

FEAR

👤 HORROR 👤 FANTASY 👤 SCIENCE FICTION 👤



MUSIC OF THE NIGHT

Danny Elfman
on scoring for movies

GREMLINS II: THE NEW BATCH HATCHES

RE-ANIMATOR 2:

Here comes the Bride

TERRY PRATCHETT
NEIL GAIMAN

Omened collaboration

Plus: John
Brunner
heads up a
bumper dose
of fiction!

INSIDE! More reviews than ever before!
MOVIES 👤 BOOKS 👤 COMICS



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BRACE YOURSELVES AMIGOS
FOR A MOST TRIUMPHANT
VIDEO!

"It's a wild,
erratic,
exuberant romp...
very enjoyable"
BARRY NORMAN FILM'90

"Check it out"
TIME OUT

P.S.
PARTY ON
DUDES!

PG

BILLY & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

"This is one cool comedy"
DAILY MIRROR

OUT ON VIDEO
5th JULY



FEAR

ISSUE No. 19

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JULY 1990

As you may know, this issue of FEAR celebrates our second anniversary and our plunge into the third year of publication. Since we started, the genre pool has grown bigger and deeper, and we've fed off the success of authors, stars and film directors in order to bring the latest news, opinion and the broadest views of a specialist field to our readers.

Still, there is always room for improvement. So, as of this issue, our editorial format will become more compact. The news (very important, according to our readers' survey) returns to the front of the magazine and is greatly expanded. You'll find new colourful features/previews that'll tell you what's happening both in Britain and the States. Major interviews with directors or stars are now part of larger features, incorporating background information and related review material.

We'll also be running many more general features and opinion pieces. This month, for instance, we've got Danny Elfman talking about scoring music for movies, an interview with Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman by top *Sunday Times* journalist Colin Greenland, and a historical overview/opinion piece on *Re-Animator* and its brand new sequel, *Re-Animator 2*. We've not just concentrated on strengthening the writing side of FEAR. You will probably notice that the design is quite different and, we hope, clearer and cleaner. And, to reflect the success of our fiction section, we are launching our FEAR Short Story Award. So don't forget to vote for your favourite author (see page 8 for details).

But enough of this hype and on with the new look issue. Finally, and most importantly, please tell us what you think: after all, it's you we answer to...

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The latest bone-crunching news from around the globe, featuring *Gremlins 2*, the midnight marauders are back; *Tremors*, the monster movie rewritten; and make-up FX master John Buechler, swapping the scalpel for stardom in *Sleeping Car*

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GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH

The sharp-toothed midgets of mischief and mayhem are back! J B Macabre reports on the making of this new Joe Dante movie.

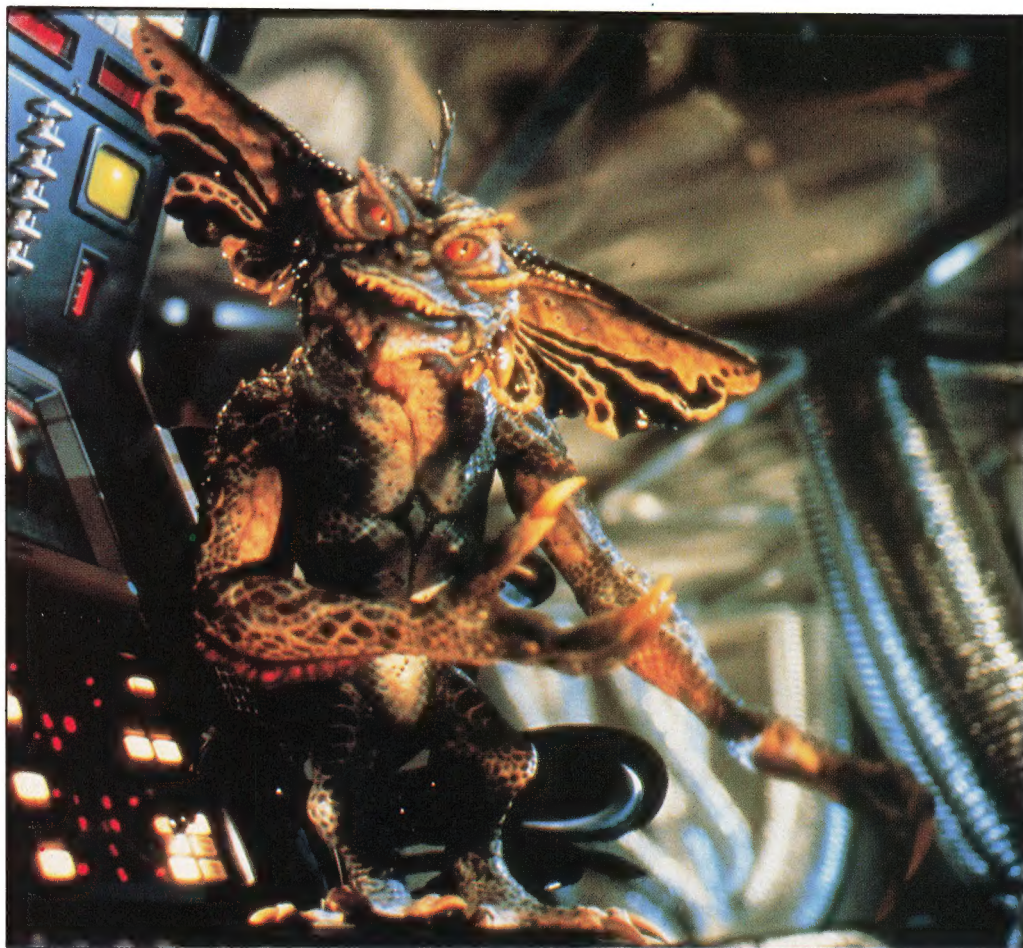
Six years have passed since Gizmo arrived, on Christmas day, at the Peltzer household. It was soon after then — when the rules (keep him away from water and bright lights and, most importantly, never, ever feed him after midnight) were broken — that the town of Kingston Falls was besieged by a mischievous, marauding band of Gremlins.

Gremlins 2: The New Batch once again has director Joe Dante at the helm. Also returning to the project from the first film is producer Michael Finnell and executive producers Steven Spielberg, Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall. Academy award winner for special effects make-up, Rick Baker, joins the team as co-producer.

Billy Peltzer, played by Zach Galligan, and Kate Beringer (Phoebe Cates) have headed out on their own to seek their fortunes. And what better place to start than in the Big Apple? They begin their climb up the corporate ladder at a giant industry owned by Manhattan tycoon Daniel Clamp (John Glover).

'We had gotten as far as knowing we 'wanted to see the Gremlins in New York,' says Joe Dante. 'But having them run wild over the streets and into the subways was out of the question. It was only when we were all agreed on the basic premise — and the actual size of the production to allow us the freedom we needed — that it began to seem feasible.'

The story is set in Clamp Center — a majestic high rise business complex. Taking up residence there is Grandpa Fred, a TV personality who hosts a late night horror show, and Splice O' Lite Labs, headed by Dr Catheter (Christopher Lee). To Billy and Kate's surprise, Gizmo reappears and they run into trouble when a new generation of creatures is created through a series of



mishaps. Once again, the trio must join forces to undo these new Gremlins that threaten to overrun Clamp Center.

CATHEDRAL OF GREED

In addition to their dark side, this new generation of Gremlins has a broad assortment of outlandish personalities that are radical enough to take the residents of Manhattan by surprise.

'The sequel comes six years after the original. During that time, technology has improved and audiences have become even more sophisticated and critical. They want this kind of genre film to deliver the goods. We felt we had to back it up with the excitement and comedy, with as many interesting effects as possible. Consequently, it became a tremendous technical challenge,' explains Michael Finnell.

After a week's shoot in New York City, the crew's attention turned to the sound stages of

Warner Brothers studios in Burbank. Production designer James Spencer created a tiered lobby constructed from marble, steel and concrete, a 50 store shopping mall, public plaza and thoroughfare that became the Clamp Center. The end result is a 'non-realistic fantasy world where everything is over the top — a cathedral of greed'.

James and Joe worked hand in hand in developing the look of Clamp Center. 'I started with basic reality and built onto that with layers of extravagance and imagination,' says Spencer. 'Sometimes it's Joe's idea and sometimes it's mine. And then John Hora, director of photography, might come up with some off-the-wall idea that proves to be totally valid. The point is to get a laugh, no matter where the suggestion comes from. And that's how movies with Joe are made: everybody's talking.'

James Spencer and John Hora

have both worked with Joe before. In addition to *Gremlins*, they all collaborated on *Innerspace* and *The 'Burbs*.

LIVING LEGEND

Aside from the excitement caused by veteran actor Christopher Lee joining the cast, there was a lot of enthusiasm about make-up wizard Rick Baker creating this new generation of Gremlins. 'Rick has been so inventive in his creations that the difficult part comes in utilising them properly in the movie,' remarks Joe. Screenwriter Charlie Haas was also thrilled to have the chance to work with this legend. 'His skills are so amazing and advanced that a writer tends to take advantage of that talent. I tended to try whatever came into my head because so little seemed to be beyond him. Just occasionally, I would go too far and needed to be restrained by the demands of the Mogwais and Gremlins.'

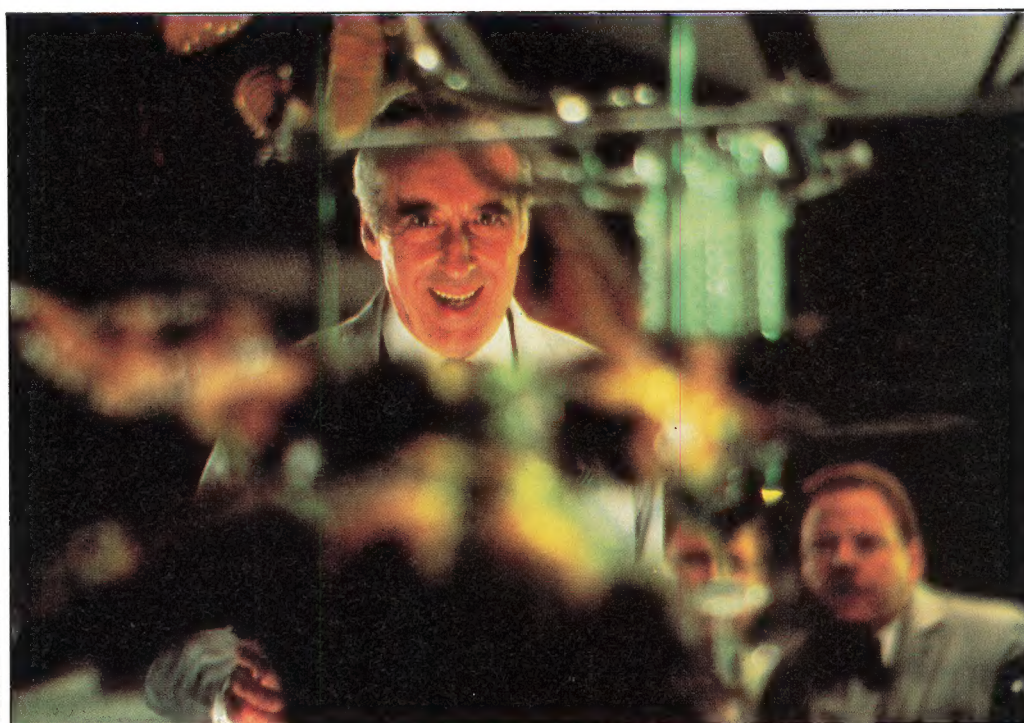
Over three months, Baker

SNIP! SNIP!



MOVIE MAINLINE

Gremlin hunting: Zach Galligan and Phoebe Cates (above), and Christopher Lee (below), face to face with the little devil itself



developed Gremlin characters from paintings, to sculptures, to moulds, and then carried out extensive video tests in order to perfect them. 'I was enthusiastic about working on the movie, as long as I could do something quite different from the first one,' he states. 'Gizmo hasn't changed much, but there are now several different characters among the Gremlins — Lenny and George, Daffy and Mohawk, to name but a few — who now evolve from their Mogwai characters into Gremlin personalities and retain their earlier physical characteristics.'

Joe Dante has collaborated with screenwriter Charlie Haas to

dream up the characters of the new Gremlins. 'Joe Dante has an advanced comedy style that takes audiences by surprise. It makes scary scenes that much scarier and the funny stuff that much funnier, because he generally finds the unexpected and catches people off guard,' comments Charlie.

It cannot be denied that part of the success of Joe's films has to be down to the relationship he shares with his crew. The closest bond is between Joe and producer Michael Finnell, an association which goes all the way back to Roger Corman and New World Pictures. To date, they have

worked on over six major motion pictures together. 'We share the same philosophy that movies should provide larger-than-life experiences,' says Mike, 'and we gravitate towards subjects that are fantastic, because you can only do those things in movies. Making an audience believe in something that can't happen — and actually creating an illusion that it can — is very exciting.'

Gremlins 2, the movie, opens on 27 July nationwide.

● **Total Recall**, the new **Arnold Schwarzenegger** picture based on a **Philip K Dick** story and directed by **Paul Verhoeven**, came in at a budget of \$73 million, making it the most expensive picture ever. Preview footage indicates the film is

Terminator Goes To Mars and is damned impressive. At that price, it'd better be! Speaking of which...

Terminator 2 (which may go out under the title **T2**) has had its start date put back to September. The sequel to the pic that made Arnie show the world there was more to him than just groaning as Conan is reportedly budgeted at \$60 million — that's \$20 million more than the first film grossed in America. Arnold is expected to take \$15 million for reprising the role and another \$5 million is apparently heading into **Harlan Ellison's** bank account as part of the settlement concerning the plagiarism suit he brought against **James Cameron** over the original's resemblance to **Demon With The Glass Hand** from **The Outer Limits**.

Another mega budget... **Die Hard 2** came in at \$63 million. These figures mean that such pictures will have to gross more than \$120 million each to make a profit.

● British-based company **The Movie House** and LA-based **Wildstreet Pictures** (**Society**, **Bride Of Re-Animator**) have formed **The Production Line**, a new sales company. The Movie House is part of Medusa Communications, the highly successful British video label, which will shortly be releasing **Maniac Cop 2**, and Frank Hennenlotter's **Frankenhooker**. Also in the works are **Maniac Cop 3** and a new version of **The Invisible Man** written by **George R R Martin** (**Fere Dream**, **Nightflyers**) and directed by **Society** man **Brian Yuzna**. Preproduction publicity says, 'Science has created a madman, his mind warped by outlandish laser experiments and drugs... his body totally invisible! HG Wells' classic tale taken to new heights of terror in this futuristic version of man and technology clashing... at the vanishing point...'

Philip Nutman/JB
Macabre/John Gilbert



THE WORLD OF FEAR

MOVIE MAINLINE

AFTER SHOCK

Sitcom nice guy Michael Gross tells of his transformation into a gun-crazy survivalist in the soon to be released *Tremors*, a contemporary cowboy picture and a Fifties monster movie rolled into one...

I like to twist myself into other shapes, it's part of what I refer to as my 'dark nature', says Michael Gross, star of Ron Underwood's *Tremors*, a new comedy monster movie executive produced by the influential and gifted Gale Anne Hurd.

Gross's current role is certainly a far cry from Steven Keaton, the liberal family man he played for years in the hit American sitcom *Family Ties*, which also had an airing in the UK on Channel 4. Just twenty-four hours after the series had wrapped he was on the set of *Tremors*, playing Burt Gummer, a paranoid right-wing survivalist from the fictitious town of Perfection, Nevada. 'I tend toward the bizarre and crazy people,' Gross continues, 'I think those extremes are more fun for any actor. Steven Keaton on *Family Ties* is probably the straightest character I ever played in my life! I enjoy the lunatic fringe much more, so I was immediately attracted to this man with no sense of humour. He's deadly serious which makes him laughable. He's very much into guns and weaponry.'

'Burt's convinced that Armageddon is coming, he doesn't know why or when exactly — but golly, he's going to be ready for it. In the movie, a lot of people poke fun at Burt's lifestyle, but it is in some way vindicated by the fact that he really is prepared when they are confronted by these subterranean man-eating creatures.'

Burt had a very personal effect on Gross. 'Since I live in California, I have put together a huge earthquake survival kit, something I had been putting off for years. I had lived in California

for seven years and hadn't done anything about it... But boy, I went to play Burt and started thinking like a survivalist! I found myself saying, 'Gee, maybe to some degree Burt's right.'

Gross was also drawn to the character because it allowed him to transform physically. 'It was a very different look for me. Some people in the business probably don't even recognise me.'

After playing in *Family Ties*, how did an actor with a reputation for niceness land such a grisly role? 'I couldn't believe it. The producers had seen my work on stage — an Ibsen play, I think — and thought: 'What a nice actor, wouldn't it be nice to cast him against type?' It's the sort of thing that's so contrary to what I've been doing on TV that one would have thought I would have to have taken the producers' door out with a bulldozer and plastic explosives just to get in!'

NEW GENRE

The *Tremors* producers were forced to put off their shooting schedule by several weeks because Gross had to finish production on *Family Ties*. 'The day after *Family Ties* wrapped, I was on my way to Lone Pine, California [the location for *Tremors*]. After a long-running and successful series like that, everybody's just dying to ask that annoying question, 'Will there be life after *Family Ties*?', so I was happy to say the very next day, 'Yes, there is.'

The atmosphere during the shoot was relaxed. 'We'd stand around on set with the writers [S S Wilson and Brent Maddock] and Ron Underwood, and have these wonderful creative conversations. We'd say, 'Jeez, before we put this shot away, is there another way we could do it? Is there another word that would best express it?' The writers were very flexible, I think that's one of the great successes of the movie too.'

'There were some hot and thirsty days, a lot of running through the desert with a lot of gear and guns and crap like that, but it was nothing but fun. I had some of my favourite twelve-hour days. I was delighted when I saw the final print, and I've seen it five times.'

Gross isn't the only admirer of this Fifties-style monster flick. Some critics have said that *Tremors* marks the beginnings of an entirely new genre. 'I don't know whether that's true or not. There is a real suspense in the piece but there's also comedy without it being a spoof. And the monsters are taken very seriously. People are hurt; killed, in some cases. In the midst of all the horror there are light moments and that's the way people relieve their tension, you know.'

SMELL OF DEATH

Perfection certainly seems to have its problems. Firstly, the town is disturbed by mysterious rumbling, this is then followed by alarming disappearances and deaths, after which enormous, intelligent, famished, odoriferous creatures nicknamed 'graboids' manifest themselves. These 30-foot long eating machines with multi-tentacled tongues and bulbous heads are capable of traveling beneath the desert at dizzying speeds.

Tremors boldly goes where no other SF movie has gone before. The film was shot almost entirely in broad daylight, which sets it apart from other low-lit monster films. Not since the black and

white, 1954, post-atomic monster movie *Them*, has a monster been seen under such illuminated scrutiny. Tom Woodruff and Alec Gillis of Amalgamated Dynamics were largely responsible for the monster. Woodruff points out: 'If we couldn't bring a sense of realism to the creature's head and tentacles, the movie wouldn't be taken seriously.'

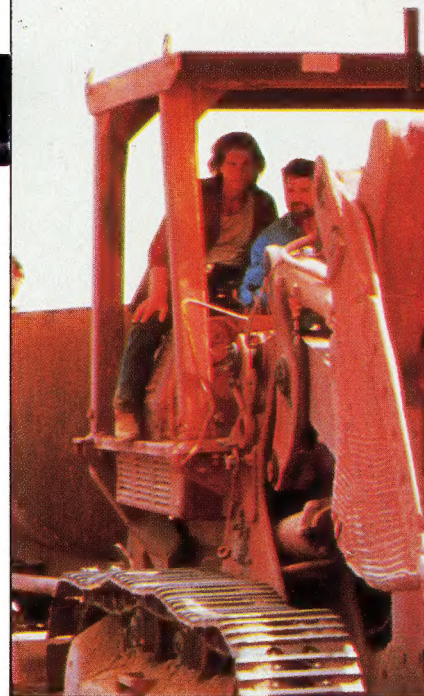
'A movie like this does have a limited audience,' remarks Gross, 'some people do not take this type of film seriously. Some of my good friends and neighbours have said, 'We know you're in it, but we don't see that kind of movie'. I would try to tell them this one is a little different, but to no avail.'

'I never said to myself, 'This is going to turn America on its heels'. I look for whatever that something is that grabs me about a character; some interest, some little quirk I can get a handle on.'

Warbeck (*The Beyond*, *The Black Cat*) is tentatively slated to star in this story, which is perhaps best described as *Mad Max* meets *A Fistful Of Dollars* and *The Wild One*. It will be followed by *The Doomed*, an action horror film budgeted at \$2 million.

Following *Death Collector's* example, a number of well known horror writers are likely to make cameo appearances. Those already approached include FEAR contributor Stanley Wiater, artist Steve Bissette, and Douglas E Winter. Top LA-based effects artist Mark Shostrom makes his acting debut as a sadistic drugs cartel executive.

'We're currently concluding a deal with a Hollywood video company, with a view to



SIX SHOOTER FIRED UP

Six Shooter Productions, the New York-based production company headed by Tom Gniazzdowski, who made *Death Collector* (now available in the UK from Guild Home Video), has loaded up a full production slate for the next two years.

Following 18 months of legal wrangles concerning *Death Collector* — aka *Tin Star Void* — and *A Girl's Guide To Sex*, Six Shooter is ready to begin production on *Blood Justice*, a futuristic action adventure, this autumn. British actor David



VETO ON VIOLENCE

Gross has played a broad variety of characters, including a few down-and-outs, and even a psychopathic killer in the television movie *In The Line Of Duty: The FBI Murders*. 'Had I not played such a sweet, warm and understanding gentleman for seven years straight, I'd be equally interested in those types of characters; right now, they have a little less attraction for me, to be honest, only because it's so fresh in my memory. I just love the variety out there.'

He chooses his roles carefully, but doesn't wait for the offers to drop on his door mat. 'I don't sit around and make a lot of moral judgements. In many cases it's not necessary because the pieces that are so blatantly stupid or immoral are usually so badly written that you never have to get into further discussions, you just

Protect and survive: Michael Gross (foreground) ready for Armageddon in Tremors

say 'pass'.

'For example, I could never see myself doing a *Rambo* movie. I could not get a big charge shooting down a lot of human beings with a gun. I think that's immoral, a glorification of the violence of humanity, of people against people. I don't like that. I wouldn't have done a slasher movie, where a score of young women are stalked by a maniac... not my idea of a good time. And I wouldn't want to participate in something like that... but a good ol' fashioned monster flick like this? Sure. Go for it.'

Tremors will be rumbling past a cinema near you from 29 June.

making three low budget, direct-to-video features per year,' Gniazdowski explains. 'This will provide Six Shooter with a financial base from which we can develop our other, bigger budgeted projects.'

Of these, *The Doomed* will be the first of three horror pictures in development. *Nighthunters*, another genre story with an action slant, is the brainchild of Michael Lang, a former FEAR stringer and the other key player in the Six Shooter set up. Lang will direct *Blood Justice* and coproduce *The Doomed*, which is written by Paul Alexander, who is currently writing a script for David Lynch.

'The action market is a big slice of the US home video scene,' Gniazdowski

continues, 'and although we plan on developing a number of horror projects, action is our best bet for establishing Six Shooter. Although horror hasn't been doing so well at the box office the last few months, it's holding its own on video, so to combine the two genres is a good move'.

Michael Lang concurs: 'Aliens was a great example of a movie that was both scary and exciting, and *The Doomed* has the same slant. It's the story of a group of escaped convicts who enter a crumbling hotel in search of hidden money. What they don't know is the building is now inhabited by a race of supernatural creatures. The film has a lot of potential'. Philip Nutman

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The NIGHTS of PENDRAGON

WHEN THE PAST COMES TO THE PRESENT TO SAVE THE FUTURE...

By **DAN ABNETT & JOHN TOMLINSON**
 Drawn by **GARY ERSKINE & ANDY LANNING**
 Covers by **ALAN DAVIS**

OUT NOW FROM MARVEL COMICS

THE WORLD OF FEAR

FEAR FICTION AWARDS

To celebrate the success of FEAR's fiction section, we have decided to introduce a FEAR Fiction Award, and we depend on you our readers to tell us which author, of all those whose work we have published within these pages over the last twelve months, should receive this horrific accolade.

In fact, we want you to nominate TWO authors, as the award will be presented in two parts: the first to an established author (we have as a rule published one piece by a known author in each issue), and the second to the best new author. The winner will receive a fantastic framed certificate, lovingly illustrated by FEAR's illustrious home grown artist, Oliver Frey, and they will be presented with their trophy at FantasyCon XV, which takes place in September at the Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham.

So read the list of nominees below, reread those fab FEAR stories, then fill in the form and send it to: FEAR FICTION AWARD, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW.

The first two entries to be dragged kicking and screaming from the FEAR mausoleum will each receive

a £25 book token.

Talking of winners: **THE FEAR QUESTIONNAIRE!** And you thought we'd forgotten... Thank you for helping us to find out what you want to read in FEAR by filling in the IS FEAR FAB? question and answer form. The two winning entries drawn from the creepy coffin are: Steve Knott from London SW6 and Rose Ballard from Darlington, County Durham. A £25 book token will be winging its way to both of you very soon.

ESTABLISHED AUTHORS

NECROSCOPE III: THE SOURCE Brian Lumley's Necroscope saga continues with a murderous blast from the prehistoric past (Issue 8).

NIGHT PLAGUE By Graham Masterton. Stanley, Graham and Angie stumble upon supernatural horrors through Tennyson's portals... And where the hell is Knitted Hood? (Issue 9)

THE DARK HALF By Stephen King. Eleven year old budding genius Thad Beaumont has something on his mind. (Issue 10)

JUMBO PORTIONS By Christopher Fowler. Let's do lunch. (Issue 11)

TIRED ANGEL By Jonathan Carroll. The private obsessions of a professional voyeur. (Issue 12)

THE DECOY By Guy N Smith. Killer crabs on the loose meet a stranger on the shore. (Issue 13)

LAMBERT LAMBERT By Ian Watson. A prison guard has consuming passions... (Issue 14)

WHERE THE HEART IS By Ramsey Campbell. Deaths in the family mean that home will never seem the same again... (Issue 15)

THE SHADOW AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD By Thomas Ligotti. The Grim Reaper presides over an extraordinary harvest. (Issue 16)

THE VULGARITY By Adrian Cole. A fantasy epic in the making, orc-less and elf-less, but full of hot fat, dribbling venom and half-digested Mars Bars. (Issue 17)

THE FRIGHTENERS By Stephen Laws. With his wife and children slaughtered, Eddie Brinkburn doesn't care what horrors befall him; but Laverick and his boys are no ordinary sadists... (Issue 18).

GOAT DANCE By Douglas Clegg. The unnatural deaths of eighteen children prompt an isolated community to wreak terrible revenge. (Issue 18).

NEW AUTHORS

ISSUE 8
FISH BAIT By Louise Hamilton. Lydia and Henry grapple with a tankful of terror.

VITAMIN Y By Wayne Dean-Richards. So that's what little boys are made of...

DEATH CAME CLAD IN BLACK By Matthew Cage. Final judgement is passed on the ultimate sinner.

THE LINE By Brain Mills. When gladiators lock horns, bloody mayhem ensues.

BEATING THE MEAT By Tony Reed. You'll never go near a butcher's shop again.

FELIS CATUS INCUBUS By Paul C Ottaway. What's yours called?

THE SENSITIVE By Antony Bennett. Two little boys in a spooky old house... sounds like there'll be tears before bedtime.

WHAT HAPPENED TO EDDIE By A E B Arkle. Horrible metamorphosis of an ordinary guy.

ISSUE 8/9
STORM IN THE WIND (Parts One and Two) By P A Gardner. A science fiction horror thriller that just keeps on coming...

ISSUE 9
CELLMATE By Steve Burford. You'll never clone alone.

CHIC CUISINE By Brian Mills. A couple of social climbers are invited to a dinner more nouvelle than they've bargained for.

THE TALE OF THE RED-EYED RAT By Chris Watson. Tall stories of verminous valance.

A TASTE OF BLOOD By Kay Callahan. You'll lap it up.

DEAD SHE WAS By Alison Brooks. Well, she was — but she ain't no more.

OVER THE TOP By Duncan Adams. An over-stressed psychologist discovers that you're as Jung as you feel.

ISSUE 10
WEIGHTYWATCHER By Adam Page. Monty and Minnie discover that fat is a fatal tissue.

DREYFUSS DOGS By Simon D Ings. Corporate evil in London's Docklands leads to a new breed of canine consumer.

THE MIRROR By Deena J Carvell. A family heirloom reflects dark secrets that happy couples shouldn't have between them.

TAR By Cliff Wallace. WARNING: cigarettes can seriously wreck your life.

THE JOURNEY By Cliff Ramshaw. A tale of knights of old, and dragons even older...

A BITER BIT By Simon Clark. Three bully boys and their two drunken victims star in a story guaranteed to give you indigestion.

ISSUE 11
THE MUD By D W Sheridan. Active service in Vietnam brings Danny face to face with his ultimate nightmare.

HARRY'S BLACK AND DECKER By Stephen Harris. Have drill, will travel.

WINTER ON AUBARCH 6 By David Riley. Bring your thermal underwear on this journey into SF horror.

SO THE DEAD WALK SLOWLY By Jeff Vandermeer. Knick knack paddy whack, tear out your bloody bones, this old man has come on home...

THE TOP FLOOR By Sara J Townsend. Paul and Tony get a lift out of high rise horror.

ISSUE 12
THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS INFINITE By Suzanne Ruthven. Even poltergeists have their problems...

ROAD By Stephen A Woodward. A man, a boy, a dusty highway — and Death riding in the fast lane.

HOSTS By F W Steel. Would you share your after-dinner mint with an intellectual werewolf?

DEVIL'S CASKET By Desmond Edwards. A supernatural box of tricks unleashes death and destruction on turn of the century London.

TWITCHER By Rob Pike. Small town yobbos, evil parents and dog-slayers beware! Hell knows no fury like a Twitcher scorned.

ISSUE 13
CARLISLE HUNTER By Nicola German.

Beware of men in grey hats with glittering grey eyes...

STATE OF THE ART By Ian Harding. Gives a whole new meaning to the term 'still life'.

SIMULATOR By Paul Dennis. Wanna come round and play?

COUP DE GRACE By Kirk S King. Evil is free...

ONE OF THE GANG By Paul Mills. How far would you go to join?

THE IRON GROUND By James M Anderton. Donna discovers trouble at t' gym.

CLANCY By Martin Cook. Things can get dull when you are keeper of the living dead...

ISSUE 14
SIX DEAD BOYS IN A VERY DARK WORLD By Mark Chadborn. Well, as they say, life is too good for the young.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW By M W Gower. An antiques buyers' acquisitiveness leads to her downfall.

CARL BOSCEK IS DEAD By Stephen Hand. King of the Splatterpunks goes for bust.

CHAMPION By J A Hall. Alien octopusses challenge Earthlings to a duel with a difference.

FIVE PAST FOUR By David Duggins. For drugs smugglers Jeff and Mike, time is running out...

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GARDEN By Lucy Spear. When you look under the gooseberry bush, make sure you're armed!

GETTING WHAT YOU WANT By W Paul Blakey. Is travel by MT better than sex? Read on, and find out.

ISSUE 15
SPEED DEMONS By Andrew J Wilson. Can leather boy Drury find his nerve and race with the Devil in a quest for his brother's soul?

ONE FOR SORROW By John Dickinson. Two for joy... but three means misery and bloody murder for this unhappy family.

THE GALACTIC GRAVE ROBBERS By Duncan Adams. A young girl skates up the life-threatening Ribbon to rescue frozen spirits on a frozen world.

GRAVEN IMAGES By Jessica Palmer. FX specialist Michael Davelini finds himself on the receiving end of his own macabre creations.

ISSUE 16
THIS MORTAL COIL By Mark Gorton. To chimpanzee, or not to chimpanzee? That is the question...

A BAD SEASON FOR FREAKS By Colin Davis. Lock up your daughters, your bearded ladies, your three-legged men and your big-foot boys... There's a limb fetishist in town!

ANGRY MAN By Darrell Schweitzer. What blood-chilling horrors could make an angry man forget his own life?

THE BOY WITH THE MOONSTONE EYES By Pauline Macaulay. A wintry Venice provides the backdrop to this romantic Gothic mystery.

ISSUE 17
THE PARADOX PATROL By Christopher Usher. It's not all plain sailing on the starship Happy Holiday, as Harry finds to his cost...

THE JIGSAW By Craig Turner. A padded cell, a wax crayon, a puzzle — and a man who fears the answer will be horrible as Hell.

JUST WANNA BE YOUR By Jack Wainer. A sexual encounter with teenage Mandy soon turns into a nightmare for her middle-aged lover. Can he grin and bear it...?

THE FOSSIL MAN By Simon Kemp. The mysteries of time travel provoke a wizard inventor to commit a heinous crime.

LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT By Peter T Garratt. Two time travellers find themselves in Victorian London, circa 1888. Remember 1888...?

ISSUE 18
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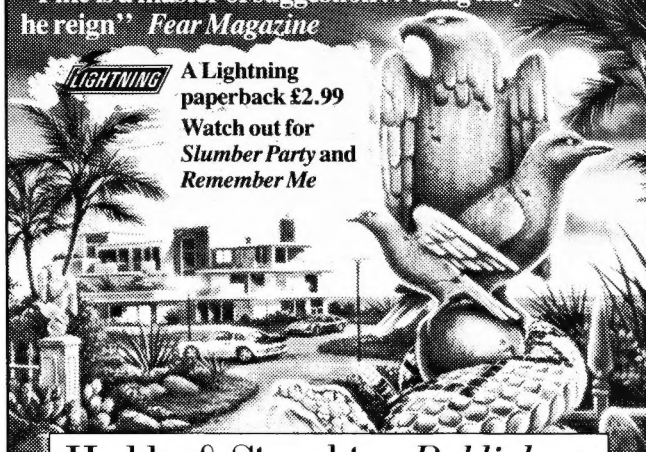
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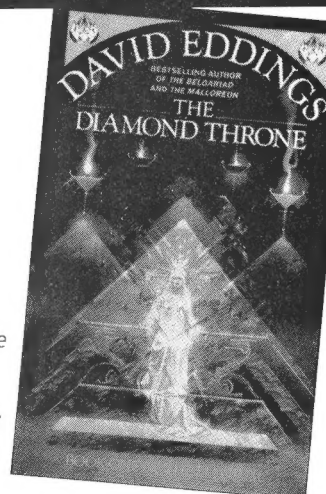
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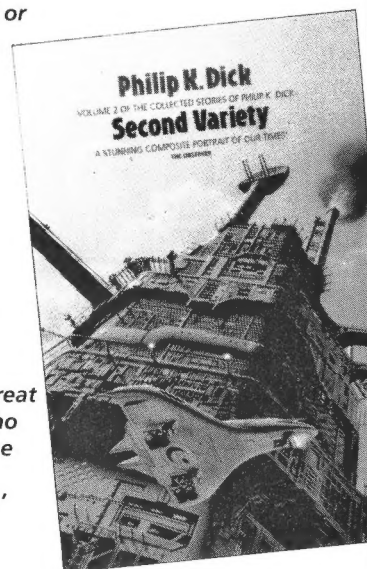
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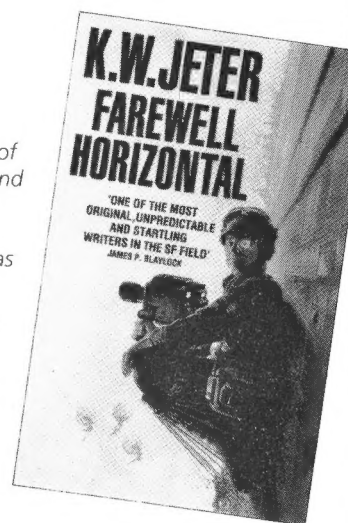
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A BRIEF HISTORY

The British Fantasy Society is Britain's best known genre organisation.

Di and Mike Wathen, leading lights of the Society's committee, introduce a regular column of BFS news with a look at how it all started.

Originally called The British Weird Fantasy Society, the BFS formed early in 1971, after an attempt to create a fantasy/horror 'special interest' group with The British Science Fiction Association failed. David Sutton — coeditor of *Fantasy Tales* and editor of the new *Pan Book Of Horror Stories* — SF writer Adrian Cole, together with Rosemary Pardoe, Keith Walker and Phil Spenser were among the names associated with the new group.

Keith Walker edited the initial issue of the Society's magazine, *The Bulletin*, in May 1971. David Sutton then took it over, producing the next 34 monthly issues of this two to three page quarto-sized newspaper.

Dark Horizons, subtitled *The Journal Of The British Fantasy Society* and edited by Rosemary Pardoe, appeared soon after. Other early services to members included a lending library, a fanzine newsletter and a critical circle for beginner writers. At the end of the first year, the membership stood at 34.

Famed fantasy writer and publisher August Derleth died in the summer of 1971, and Ramsey Campbell suggested that the Society present an annual memorial award to a work of outstanding literary merit within the genre. Ramsey administered the award (originally a scroll designed by James Cawthorn) and the winner was announced at Chessmacon, the 1972 Easter SF convention. This first award went

to *The Knight Of Swords* by Michael Moorcock. Also held at the same event was the Society's first AGM, at which Ramsey Campbell was elected Honorary President (a post he still holds), and the word 'Weird' was dropped from the Society's name.

In 1973, a range of awards (best novel, best short story, best film, best comic, plus a special award) was announced at the Eastercon, and a one-off Fantasy Fayre was organised by the BFS within the Beyond The Horizon SF And Space Exploration Festival. Also, in the same year, the arguments started.

Accusations of apathy flew: too much horror at the expense of other aspects of the genre, lack of news in *The Bulletin*, etc. This seemed to shake the young Society up, and the next couple of years showed improvement. The magazines improved, and the first Fantasycon was held, albeit only a one day affair, in Birmingham.

1976 saw Fantasy II, a weekend of events with Robert Aickman as Guest Of Honour and Kenneth Bulmer as Master Of Ceremonies. A year after, the first of the Society's one-off booklets appeared, and *Dark Horizons* did its first disappearing act, when its then-editor Stephen Jones resigned to go on to better things, and nobody volunteered to take over the post.

And so things have continued; the membership has slowly increased to its present count of 500, the magazines are produced regularly (or not, depending on the time and enthusiasm of those involved in what is, after all, a spare-time activity). The Bulletin has improved in content and appearance, but decreased in number of issues, becoming *The British Fantasy Newsletter* in 1982 after a six month gap.

Around this time, the Society almost collapsed, with the convention committee parting acrimoniously from the BFS, changing the convention's name to MythCon, and refusing to present the BFS Awards there. Indeed, the BFS committee for 1982-3 had many unfilled posts, with no vice-president, FantasyCon chairman, or newsletter editor.

Enter Stephen Jones (for at

least the second time) and Jo Fletcher, who saved the Society and FantasyCon in what was supposed to be a stop-gap measure but became a tenure which lasted for three years. They also dragged us in to help.

The present management took office in early 1985, and since then it's been uphill all the way. FantasyCon is now firmly established as an annual event, drawing the top names in the genre, and the BFS publications appear regularly (sometimes even on time, thanks mainly to the sterling efforts of Peter Coleborn).

Now FEAR wants to forge closer links with the Society — which is not unreasonable, since the BFS Committee actively supported the magazine originally (and it was the discerning BFS members' votes that gave John Gilbert his Best Newcomer's Award last year). Hence this column, where we, and other BFS parties, can have our say from month to month.

All criticisms to John, please. All enquiries about the BFS, this year's FantasyCon (our 15th!), praise and cheques to us at 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DE.

CON WATCH

FantasyCon XV opens its doors between 14-16

September at the Midland Hotel, New Street,

Birmingham. US Guest of Honour is Joe R Lansdale, the young, horror-writing cowboy whose books *The Drive-In*, *Nightrunners* and *Bizarre Hands* have got horror fans all of a fluster. He is joined by Stephen Gallagher, the UK Guest of Honour and author of *Rain*, *Down River* and the soon to be televised *Chimera*. Master of Ceremonies is American novelist and esteemed critic John M Ford. We hope you'll join us for our FEAR Fiction Award Presentation and, of course, the usual Dead Dog Party.

Full attending membership costs £12.00 (\$22.00) for BFS members — £14.00 (\$25.00) for non-members. Supporting membership is £5.00 (\$10.00). All donations to FantasyCon XV, 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DE.

SNIP! SNIP!

- The lizard is back... *Godzilla* returns to our screens in **Godzilla vs Biollante**. **Scanners 2: The New Order** opens in the US this fall. A semi-sequel to **David Cronenberg's** exploding head flick of 1980, the new film is directed by **Christian Duguay** and written by **B J Nelson** (who?). The only connection the picture has with the original is executive producer **Pierre David**. Cast includes **David Hewlett**, **Yvan Ponton** and **Deborah Raffin**. And already in preproduction, **Scanners 3: The Takeover**. The sequel line rolls again with **Pumpkinhead 2**, as **Stan Winston's** creature pops back up from its patch, and **House 4**, which may be an underwater **Shocker** (in-genre joke). Oops — gremlins in the word processor! Last month we poked fun at **Transit**, the serial killer from beyond the grave movie directed by **Robert Reisneko**. The movie has undergone a title change — to **The First Power**, not **Possessed**, as we incorrectly stated.
- Another title change: **Arachnophobia**, the **Spielberg**-produced directoral debut of long time Amblin partner **Frank Marshall**, is now creeping into theatres under the title **Along Came A Spider**.
- **Linnea Quigley** is making a new flick. Title? **Revenge Of The Scream Queens**. Figures. **Shadowzone** writer/director **J S Cardone** is shooting **A Row Of Crows** in LA. The flick is a contemporary film noir.
- **Hellbound** helmer **Tony Randel** is back in the directoral saddle with **Children Of The Night**, a low budget contemporary vampire flick aimed at the home video market. Producer is **Christopher Webster**, who was one of the money men behind the **Hellraiser** films. Shooting continues this month at Webster's Windsor Lake Studios in Wisconsin.
- **Philip Nutman**/**JB Macabre**/**John Gilbert**

ROMERO'S DEAD LIVE AGAIN

While **Darkside: The Movie** was shooting on its New York locations earlier this year, back in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Laurel Entertainment's former leading light, **George A Romero**, was hard at work preparing for the production of the long-talked-about colour remake of **Night Of The Living Dead**. Rewritten and updated by Romero prior to his adaptation of **Darkside's Cat From Hell**, the filmmaker and his collaborators — including **Tom Savini**, making his feature debut as director — had to wait over a year for financiers 21st Century Film Corp to finalise the \$4 million budget following the cash flow problems the company experienced after its inception in 1988.

Shooting commenced on April 23, and at press time sources close

to the production reported that Savini was only one day behind schedule, suggesting that the film will wrap around its proposed mid-June date, ensuring release this **Halloween** through **Columbia Pictures**.

For their cast, Savini and Romero have opted to draw on talent from both coasts rather than just Hollywood. Essaying the role of Barbara, the near catatonic heroine, is **Patricia Tallman**, who previously worked with them on **Knightriders**. In the lead is newcomer **Tony Todd**, recreating the role of Ben, originally played by the late **Duane Jones**. Also appearing are **Tom Towles** (Otis in **Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer**) and **Bill Butler** from **Leatherface**. As with the original, Romero plans to use local Pittsburgh talent in

addition to cameos by friends — including **Skipp and Spector** as a thanks for **The Book Of The Dead** anthology.

Handling the effects are Savini's former assistants **John Vulich** and **Everett Burrell**, both of whom worked on **Dawn Of The Dead**.

When questioned about the desire to remake a phenomenally successful classic, Romero is unusually candid, citing money as the prime motivator. Considering the huge sums **Night Of The Living Dead** is reported to have grossed over the years (figures most often quoted are in the \$50 to \$70 million range) one would assume Romero to be a very wealthy man, but the simple truth is that he is not. Copyright problems concerning the original are largely responsible for the remake's existence.

Night Of The Living Dead was financed by 26 Pittsburgh-based investors who comprised **Image Ten**, the commercials company Romero headed with co-writer

John Russo, actor **Russell Strainer** and others involved with the movie. They copyrighted the original picture as **Night Of The Flesh Eaters**, but when the distribution deal was struck with the Walter Reade group, they changed the title, and the copyright was not altered accordingly. Consequently, a lot of people have made a lot of money off the film — but not Romero and his partners. In fact, it wasn't until 1986 that Image Ten were finally able to secure a new copyright. A remake finally allows the partners to reap the rewards so long denied them, as one industry source puts it: 'There's a substantial **Night Of The Living Dead** industry out there and George hasn't had a fair cut. God knows, he deserves it. That movie did change the face of the horror film as we know it.'

Look out for a full **FEAR** set report, coming soon.
Philip Nutman

SUCKLING SEX SENSATION

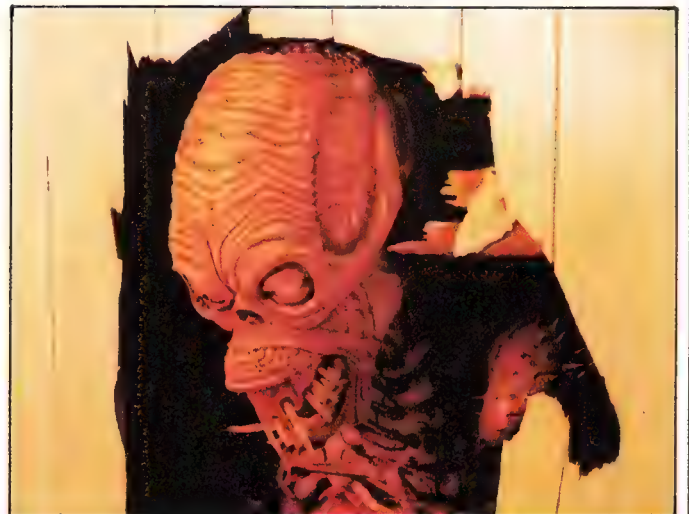


Our vote for sickest movie of the year is **The Suckling**, starring **Lita Pateino** and **Michael Logan**, which graphically depicts the experiences of a girl who is forced to have an abortion. But the foetus comes back and wreaks a messy revenge on those who consigned it to death.

The movie was independently produced, written and directed by **Francis Teri**, whose other horror flicks include **I Was A Teenage Zombie** and **Flesh Eating Mothers**. The foetus was created by **Ralph**

Cordero.

Teri has already found an independent distributor in **JBR**. At one time the movie was even racier than it is now. The original backer wrote some raunchy sex scenes which had nothing to do with the plot and even provided a woman for these romps — she was also to have featured heavily on the movie poster. Her appearance ran contrary to the plot as everyone but the mother dies! She, however, literally walked out of the picture, and **Teri** reclaimed the rights and cut the scenes.
John Gilbert/J B Macabre



UNDER THE HAMMER

The pride of British independent filmmaking is resurrected as UK heavy metal band Warfare release their latest album, *Hammer Horror*.

Backed up by cover notes from Peter 'Van Helsing' Cushing and Christopher 'Dracula' Lee, the album contains ten tracks, each featuring an aspect of Hammer films. The title track is 'Hammer Horror', and it's followed by 'Plague Of The Zombies', 'Baron Frankenstein', 'Solo Of Shadows', 'Prince Of Darkness' and 'Scream Of The Vampire'. Full review next issue.

The band comprises Evo (lead vocalist/drummer), Zlaughter (bass), Gunner (guitars) and Laser (keyboards). Together with



'Warfare' hammer it home

Hammer director Roy Skeggs, they hope to usher in a new era for British horror moviemaking (see our major

Hammer feature, next issue, where we'll spill some major secrets).

BLACK SUNDAY SUCCESS

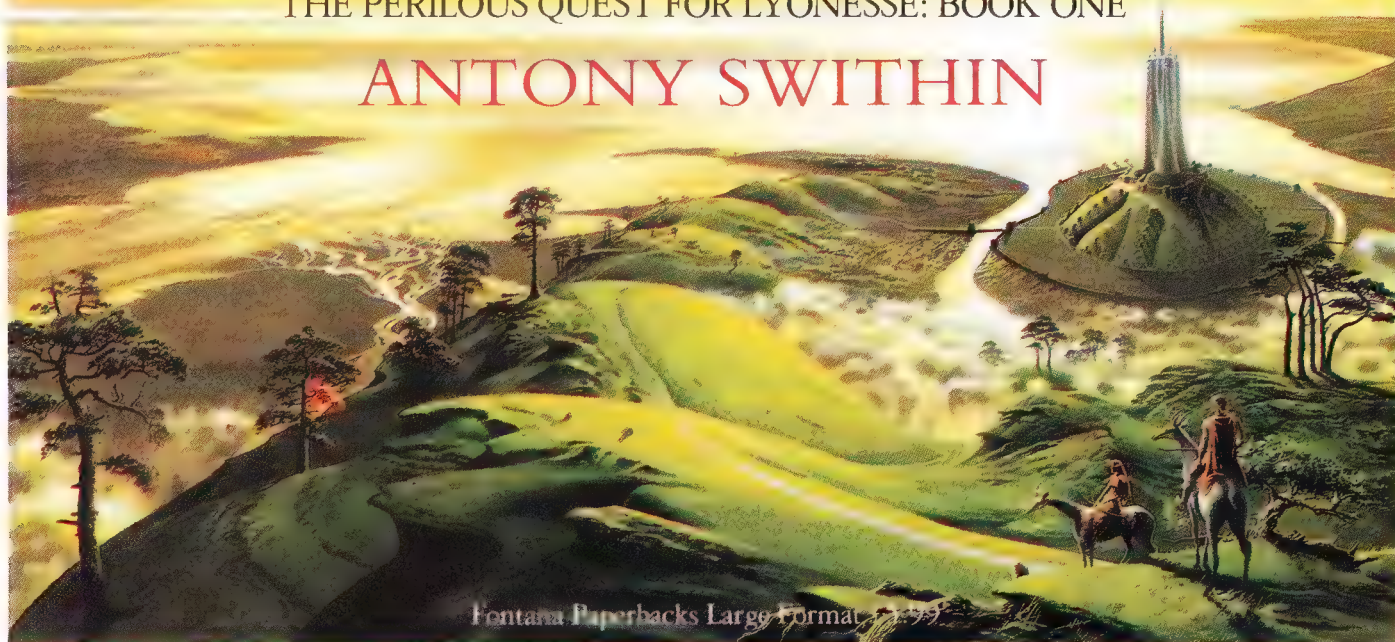
The success of the two Black Sunday film festivals in February has spurred the organisers to put on another double event. It's back to the Metro Cinema, Old Street, Ashton Under Lyme for the first filmic feast which begins at 11.30 pm on Saturday June 23 and ends on Sunday at 6.30 pm.

The programme is still open to change — aren't they all? — but ten films will be shown and these could include *Basket Case 2*, *Frankenhooker*, *Maniac Cop 2*, *Night Of The Living Dead*, *The Guardian*, *Nightbreed*, *Halloween 5*, *Leatherface*, *Hardware*, *Exorcist 3* and *Robocop 2*. Tickets can be obtained from The Organisers, Black Sunday, 51 Thatch Leach Lane, Whitfield, Manchester M25 6EW. You can also phone (061) 766 2566 or (0204) 884189. Tickets will not be available on the door.

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MISTER MAKE-UP

John Buechler is known primarily for his special effects work on *Ghoulies*, *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, *Friday The Thirteenth* and the *Halloween* series. However, as *Sleeping Car*, his latest horror movie from Castle Home Video proves, he's also got acting and directing talents to his credit. John Gilbert examines the evidence.

In the main, moviegoers know John Buechler as a special effects artist. His Hollywood-based company, Magical Media Industries, has created the visuals for two *Ghoulies* films, *A Nightmare On Elm Street 4*, *Friday The Thirteenth: Part 7* (which he also directed) and *Halloween 4*.

His most recent venture, however, has taken him in front of the camera as the infamous rail ghost The Mister in Castle Pictures' *Sleeping Car* and put him in the director's chair for *Ghoulies 3: Ghoulies Go To College*.

Buechler has accumulated plenty of experience for his move into the limelight, acting on stage in professional Shakespearean productions as well as in big screen bit parts. 'Acting is not new to me. One of the first films I was involved with was *The Thing In The Basement*, where I played a thing that was green and scaly. I also had a role in *Sting-Ray*.'

His major movie break came about because of his self-taught efforts in the area of prosthetic effects. 'I have three degrees in the fine arts, cinema and theatre. I wanted to make films of a specific visual quality. When I studied make-up and sculpture and kinetic sculpture [animatronics] at South Illinois University, there wasn't a standard as there is now. There were no specific structured courses, so you had to make it up as you went along.'



PRO-FILES

ART AND ILLUSION

Buechler does not find it difficult to adapt the skills he developed in university in order to act and direct well as create special effects. The three careers are all tied together by film: 'A movie is a special effects illusion. You're creating 24 frames of image a second, going through a projector gate; special effects, matte painting, lighting are all parts of the filmmaking process, the nuts and bolts. A good filmmaker will be a filmmaking artist. I don't think motion picture making will ever evolve out of being an art form. It's not a true science where you can have A, B, C, and you get it.'

He does, however, think that the job of effects designer is unique. 'It's unlike any other effects technical job in the business, for example, being a matte painter. You don't just work through a process or turn on a machine.'

'Make-up effects requires that you build, from the feet up, a complete character. An effects designer acts as a police sketch artist. He does some drawings and then asks the director, 'Is this the monster you saw?'

Unfortunately, as with movies such as *Sleeping Car*, the ideal of a big budget and a huge filmic canvas is not always attainable but even then, according to

Buechler, you can have some fun: 'The challenge of doing a low budget movie is greater if you're allowed to do something you haven't done before, or if you can match something done in a big budget movie on a lower budget. The challenge is to stretch yourself to the limits and make it look wonderful.'

SEQUEL SUCCESS

The management of big budget pictures can also pose more problems than low budgeters for special effects creators. 'There are often too many chiefs. In a low budget picture, when fewer people are making the decisions, you can get a lot more mileage out of the effects. Often, in big budget films, everything is shot by committee, and if anything goes wrong they just throw more money at it and shoot it again. With low budget, there's a certain sense of economy of construction.'

Moving on from the specifically low budget arena, Buechler broaches the subject of sequels. He's directed *Friday The Thirteenth: Part 7*, is about to direct *Ghoulies 3*, and is keen to spell out the reasoning behind his involvement. 'When you're asked by a director to do a sequel, you are hit by two different emotions. One: it has a built-in audience who will see your work, and two:

A menace in make-up: John Buechler as The Mister in *Sleeping Car*

sequels tend never to live up to original expectations. But you want to make it workable.'

Sometimes, as with the successful *Friday The Thirteenth: Part 7*, a director can find new life in an old format. 'I think the sequence in which we unmask Jason and have a plethora of special effects, [maggots and worms wriggling out of a grey, decaying, face] that, for me, was the reason for doing the film. Also, I'm not interested in the standard stalk and slash garbage. The last two reels of that film were pleasing to me because there was more fantasy and magic, and there was a girl who wasn't just going to wait around to be cut up.'

'I've never liked blood or graphic violence. It's disgusting. Why watch it? Do you really create a better sense of horror by depicting the mutilation or do you get it from the tease? The graphic mutilation in the first *Friday The Thirteenth* film was fine, because nobody had seen that kind of thing before. Now everyone goes for the flesh-shredding. What attracted me as a kid was a sense of the fantastic, of anticipation, and a fascination with ghosts or monsters.'

THE WORLD OF FEAR

BUSINESS BULLSHIT

Buechler does, however, set apart some of the *A Nightmare On Elm Street* films from the standard serial killer fare. 'It's based on surrealism rather than on stalk and slash. The material I did on *Nightmare 4* was wonderful; having all those faces come out of Freddy's chest. My Freddy film was certainly the most successful with the action/magic sequences. Just like Jason [in *Friday 7*], where he just keeps coming back.'

Though Buechler has moved onto big bucks Hollywood fare, he is quick to state that his time

College, when he also plans to reprise his effects work from the original and sequel movies. 'Why, after directing one of the most successful *Friday The Thirteenth* movies in years, do I want to do a *Ghoulies* film? Well, people think I directed *Ghoulies 1* and 2. I was offered the directorship of 2 but the script was so bad. Now I've come to direct number 3, and it's like a penance. I'm going to put a *Ghoulies* movie together that lives up to the original's poster.'

His penance landed, like a gremlin, out of the blue. 'I was sitting in my office developing a



with low budget horror director/producer Roger Corman had a huge influence on his work. 'Roger taught me that economy and simplicity are important to the filmmaking process, that with limited resources you must force yourself to see what the audience is going to perceive. Hollywood is so full of the bullshit of putting the deal together and putting money into it. To many people, it's all business.'

Buechler points to the business, and to the holier-than-thou attitudes of the major filmmakers as the stumbling block to injecting more money into genre movies. 'Film people hate genre movies and nobody wants to be branded as a genre director. There's also this process whereby people 'graduate' from genre to mainstream movies. There's a stigma attached to people who work in genre films, so that, for instance, you would find it difficult to go from genre to a love story.'

GHOULIES LIVE

The director/SFX man obviously has no qualms about being seen as a genre devotee. His next directorial job is on *Ghoulies Go To*

screenplay for a picture called *Hellspawn* and I got a call from Vestron asking me to direct the film. I said 'No', and put the phone down. Then I thought about it, called them up and said, 'Can I make it a comedy?' They said 'absolutely not', but called back later and said what a great idea. The new *Ghoulies* will have personalities and dialogue, and the special effects show what Roger Rabbit might do in a Three Stooges' comedy — like someone having their nose pulled across the room.'

Buechler's formula, or lack of it, for movies such as *Ghoulies Go To College* has attracted the attention of the Hollywood big guns. His next projects are a movie called *Shapeshifter*, and *Hellspawn*, a fantasy/action/adventure. He's also being considered as a director by Disney and intends to set up his own production company, of which MMI will be just a part.

Keep reading **FEAR**, for new developments as they happen!

Sleeping Car was released onto video rental on 7 June.



WALK ON THE DARK SIDE

Deborah Harry (left) in *Lover's Vow*

'The film brings moviegoers the stories that, frankly, we couldn't make for television,' notes producer **Richard P Rubinstein**. 'In the course of exploring a great deal of exciting horror material over a period of many years, we came across stories that, for various reasons — relating to the scope, subject matter, or the intricate effects required — were better suited to the big screen.'

Darkside: The Movie opened in the US on May 4 to good box office and generally favourable reviews. Although the last of the television series was generally weak, Rubinstein's comments accurately eschew typical producer hyperbole, for the big screen version turns out to be the best anthology movie in a long while. Well-shot and brilliantly cast by long-time **Laurel Entertainment** associate **John Harrison** — he composed the score for *Creepshow* and wrote/directed several *Darksides* and *Monsters* — the movie is an accomplished theatrical debut.

Featuring three tales based on stories by **Stephen King**, **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** and **Michael McDowell**, the film opens with an amusing framework vignette starring **Debbie Harry** as a seemingly normal housewife. Like most anthologies, linking narrative is slight but in this case it sets the macabre tone of what is to follow. All the stories have their share of shocks and black humour, well balanced by good casting and competent effects by **KNB**.

Lot 249, from a little known Conan Doyle story, works its grim magic through **Christian Slater's**

performance as a young, **Jack Nicholson**-inspired yuppie, proving that his performance along these lines in *Heathers* was no fluke. The consignment of the title turns out to be a **mummy**, and the events are fairly predictable but the interplay between Slater and costar **Steve Buscemi**, combined with Harrison's Gothic style, makes it work.

Stephen King's *Cat From Hell* also benefits from spot-on casting, with musician **Buster Poindexter** a suitably mean foil to **William Hickey's** embittered pharmaceuticals millionaire. The final tale, *Lover's Vow*, an original by McDowell, delivers a solid punch. Described by Harrison as 'a horrific fairy tale love story,' the film noir style and on-screen chemistry between **James Remar** and **Rae Dawn Chong** ease the narrative through the deliberate plot holes towards a 'surprise' ending, which any fan well-versed in twists in the tale will see coming around halfway through. Regardless of this, Harrison's sensitivity with the material and **KNB's** effects (some of their best work to date), make for memorable viewing.

'I wanted to make a rollercoaster ride of a film,' Harrison notes, 'but one that doesn't sacrifice character to plot.' This is a film in the 'things that go bump in the night' tradition of scare moviemaking,' adds Rubinstein. 'Our first objective was to combine great storytelling and acting. The special visual effects and make-up effects are meant to embellish the story. Too many movies concentrate on that angle and lose the audience because the characters are weak. **Pet Semetary** was a success because we didn't dwell on the effects side at the expense of the performances, and I think **Darkside: The Movie** will succeed for that reason.'

Philip Nutman

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MUSIC OF THE NIGHT

Batman, Beetlejuice, Nightbreed and Darkman: Danny Elfman has composed a magical catalogue of film score successes. However, despite his long association with the mysterious band Oingo Boingo, this musical maestro is more than just a phantom of the opera. FEAR's J B Macabre cranks up the volume.



T

he Californian sun warms my journey along Pacific Coast Highway; but, in contrast to the millions of other visitors who flock to this privileged part of the world, my thoughts are not preoccupied with the view of the ocean or the mighty cliff, instead my mind is retracing the voluminous soundtrack credits of composer Danny Elfman.

Most people familiar with Elfman's name, have come to it fairly recently by virtue of his groundbreaking work on *Batman*. But he has also scored *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*, *Beetlejuice*, *Back To School*, *Hot To Trot*, *Summer School*, *Midnight Run* and *Scrooged*. He's contributed musical pieces to *Ghostbusters 2*, *She's Out Of Control*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, *Tempest* and *Something Wild*. And he's composed musical scores for the *Mummy*, *Daddy* and *Family Dog* episodes of *Amazing Stories*, and written themes for television programmes such as *Fast Times*, *Sledgehammer* and *Tales From The Crypt*.

I make my way through the hills of Tapango Canyon and eventually end up in his 'street', a steep, paved incline that snakes up the face of the mountain. Gritting my teeth, I begin to climb. On reaching my destination, I ring the doorbell, am buzzed in and find myself standing at the top of a staircase that disappears down into an Oriental wonderland, a breathtakingly beautiful garden packed with a vast variety of exotic plants, banzai trees and pagodas. My host emerges from the lowest level of the house with a mobile phone in his hand.

Danny is a unique composer. Before entering the world of film scoring, he was best known for his work with Oingo Boingo, a band that defies categorisation because of the diverse traditions it draws on for its music. The group members enjoy making music which allows them to explore and expand boundaries, and their sources of inspiration include West African music, Balinese gamelon, ska and reggae. Such catholic tastes are apparent in the difference and originality of each of Danny's film scores, as well as his pieces for the group.

Danny's preoccupation with the macabre, expressed in Oingo Boingo's music, also extends to the assortment of memorabilia that decorates his home. He not only has a collection of African and Indonesian instruments, he also collects skeletons of various shapes, including an ancient Indian skull and a skeleton carved out of wood from Bamako. It's no wonder that, as a composer, Danny sought out Clive Barker and Sam Raimi and landed the jobs of scoring *Nightbreed* and *Darkman*. However, the general atmosphere in the Elfman household — which consists of Danny, his wife, daughters Mall and Lola, and various family pets — is one of warmth and tranquillity.

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18 July 1990 FEAR



Oingo Boingo (left to right): Carl Graves, Leon Schneiderman, John Avila, Sam Phipps.

SYNTHESIS

JBM: How does someone involved with a group become a composer of film music scores?

DE: Pure chance. It was one of my fantasies to become a film composer. Realistically I figured I had a greater chance of becoming an astronaut, in terms of what your odds are on long shots. It started out with a lucky break, which was *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*. Why I was chosen, I don't really know. I believe they were looking for a non-traditional composer. Tim (Burton) and Paul (Ruen) had a lot of ideas and didn't want a traditional score. They interviewed quite a number of people. As it happened, our meeting/interview went

well. Starting out, I think Tim had more faith in me than I did. I wasn't at all confident about my ability to pull it off. I had horrible nightmares while I was working on the film about how I was going to fuck it up totally. By the time we got to the orchestra date I thought I was really going to blow it, the music was going to wreck the film, and the blame was all going to come down to me.

Happily, things didn't quite turn out that way. After the release of *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* phones started ringing. I can't say that I was initially offered the kind of movies I thought I would like to work on. I always thought that fantasy and horror were more the genres I'm inclined towards. I didn't feel any inclination towards comedy at all. All of a



Steve Bartek, Danny Elfman, Dale Turner and Johnny 'Vatos' Hernandez.

All black and white photos by Dennis Keeley

sudden it seemed I was being offered every major comedy going through Hollywood. I did a few, *Back To School* and a couple of others. It was good training for me. I found I could be imaginative within the context of a comedy if I found the right director, the right film and they just gave me a little leeway. I always knew what I wouldn't do and the kind of scoring I didn't care for — even before I became a film composer.

I detest what is being done as contemporary film scoring to a large degree. I don't like typical synthesiser scoring, although there are exceptions to that rule. There are people who use them very creatively. On the other hand, I resolved I would not do the type of scoring that I don't like when I go to the

movies. To my amazement, I found people who let me do the kind of stuff that I enjoy doing. Things have just kind of grown from there.

OFF THE WALL

Having had the opportunity to work on *Beetlejuice*, a film more in tune with the type you want to score, what was your initial reaction to having the chance to work on the *Nightbreed* project?

Well, I sought Clive out. I did *Scrooged* last year and was very unhappy with the chain of events and their outcome. The score for *Scrooged*, more or less, got thrown away. I decided then that my only salvation, other

than to wait for Tim's movies, was to get out there and find projects that I've been longing to do.

I called my agent. I told him that we had to find some young, more imaginative (or old and imaginative) off-the-wall directors to link up with. He asked who I'd be interested in working with. My response was David Lynch. Of course, he's got his own composer, like Tim and me, I respect that. I was interested in the Cohen brothers (Joel and Ethan, who dreamt up *Raising Arizona* and *Blood Simple*) too, I'm a big fan of theirs. Again, they have their own composer, Carter Burtwell. Next I thought of Sam Raimi; I'm a huge fan of *Evil Dead 2*. As soon as I saw that movie I said, 'I must work with that man!' Ironically, the same year I saw *Hellraiser*. Being a big Clive Barker fan and having read most of his books, I really wanted to work with him. So my agent went and sought these people out. Lo and behold, a month later I was working on a Clive Barker film and a Sam Raimi film!

VISIONARY

Where do you find your centre point when you begin to create a score for a film? Is it a character? Is it a theme, the title or the plot?

Usually it's the visuals, I tend to respond visually; the first rough cut (although sometimes I'll actually start to plot out some preliminary material before I've seen the first rough). I try not to get locked into it because there is a good chance that once I see the film I'll lose it all. That first screening of the first rough cut is where my best musical ideas come from. I always carry a tape recorder with me to that first screening. Usually, within hours after seeing the film, I'm playing lots of notes, singing in the car on the way back, singing thematic ideas into the recorder. By the time I get back to my piano I will not have forgotten the ideas. For example, with *Batman*, I would sing notes while I was watching it. I did write a little bit of music before for *Batman* and *Nightbreed*. However, I flew to London, saw Gotham City and got a feel for what the film was going to look like. I think that's where my first ideas came from. For *Beetlejuice*, Tim brought me on the set and I saw one of the wonderful sets they were using. On *Nightbreed* also, I watched them shooting, I started to look at some of the monsters, reading the script and talking to Clive. I started to get the idea for a certain thematic feeling.

Basically, I score themes around what the audience is supposed to be relating to in the movie. If you try to follow all the characters, you'd be switching themes every minute. I'll try to come up with three or four thematic ideas that will carry through the different modes of the film. In a movie like *Nightbreed* you've got your strange, mysterious, wonderful music of the underground, which is not what I would call religious, but it has choral music and other-worldly, mystical, religious overtones. Then, of course, we've got a rhythmic part to the score that has to do with the *Nightbreed* characters themselves. We have our scary part, which mostly revolves around the Decker character played by [David] Cronenberg. Most of the scary music is not around the Breed, it's around David's character. He's the real bad guy in the movie, not





'Once you get down to the nitty gritty, all the technology doesn't mean shit. That technology comes down to pencils and how many hours you can write before you get cramps in your right hand and have to stop and run around screaming'

the monsters. We also have a more romantic theme.

PENCIL POWER

Do you think contemporary technology gives you greater freedom to express who you are in your music?

Not really. To express who you are requires musical ideas which have to get written on paper. The technology has made it easier to do the technical plotting of working out timings and things of that nature on a film; it gives you the chance to spend more time being creative. Certainly, the technology has been useful for people without the formal training, like myself. If I have a very complex thought that I'm having a hard time maintaining in my head, seeing on paper and hearing how all the parts are going to work against each other, I can perform them on all my various synths. Just to hear the harmonies and movements playing against each other, I can get a good idea of what I'm think-

ing of and if it will actually work. It's helpful for me to experiment.

The bulk of what I do for film, even with all the synthesisers and computers I have in my studio, is still pencil and paper and shitloads of erasers. I single-handedly keep the eraser industry going. For me, that is the same as it has always been and there is no technology I've come across that can get around the hardcore work. Once I've come up with the idea, I've pencilled it out, worked it up, listened to it against screen, maybe even played for the director, I still have to write the whole god-damn thing down note for note, bar by bar.

In the style of writing that I do, I don't wash over scenes. If anything, my weakness is over-writing. It's a very difficult, time-consuming style to work in. Believe me, I work my ass off when I'm on a film. Generally it's twelve hours a day, seven days a week to get all that music down on paper. Once you get down to the nitty gritty, all the technology doesn't mean shit. That technology comes down to pencils and how many hours you can

write before you get cramps in your right hand and have to stop and run around screaming.

The old adage of inspiration and perspiration...

Yeah! I kind of divide a score into two phases that way. In the first part I'm mainly performing pieces into a computer using synthesiser, working up ideas, looking at it up against a screen. Next, I bring in the director and talk with him about thematic ideas. That's more of the inspiration stage — developing it, laying it out. I like to go into a movie very well prepared. I plot out all my major themes. I try to get an overview of where I'm going to weave things together and in what way.

Then that first day of hardcore writing approaches. I dread that day. For the next four to eight weeks, that's all I'm going to be doing. I'll spend weeks and weeks in the development, getting my gear together. Then I'm getting close to the date to start the climb and I'll procrastinate like crazy. The day comes when I'm supposed to start, and I try to think of one or two more reasons not to. Inevitably, I have to take that first step. As my wife would testify, I'm absolutely miserable to be around right at that point.

The top of that mountain seems so far away. I always feel like I'm not going to make it. Somehow or other, I find the ability to drag myself over it. At a certain point, my rhythm kicks in. The first couple of ques [the beginnings of particular segments of music] of writing are incredibly difficult. If I stop for three months (like I have to because I play with the group), to get back into writing, putting notes



on paper, seems so foreign. Before I know it the pages are flying and my orchestrator is going crazy, shouting: 'Stop!'. That's Steve Bartek, who also plays with Oingo Boingo. His career and mine have been going simultaneously. I brought him in on *Pee Wee* and we've been working together ever since.

BACK ON THE ROAD

How does your film composing affect your musical career with the band?

Well, the bad part of it is trying to shift gears. On a film you have no control over anything. I finished my first eight ques for *Nightbreed* and they've re-edited five. So I had to go back and re-do big chunks of them. It's inevitable. It's part of a film and you can't get around it. They've got to do what they've got to do and you cannot get worked up about it. When the film is done they still have the option to throw it away or do whatever they want to do with it. On a record I have total control.

So, towards the end of a film, I'm longing for the simplicity of writing and performing songs, having nobody else but myself to blame if it doesn't come out right. If it fails, it's my responsibility.

On the other hand, when I'm on a tour and in the middle of performing, I'm longing for the simple concentration of working on a film. Having all these new ideas flowing out of me. When you're on tour you are repeating yourself every night; that repetition starts to bear down on me. Then the idea of starting fresh on a project composing sixty minutes of brand new music seems wonderfully appealing.

What would you like to do next?

Well, I'd like to continue what I'm doing. The stuff I wrote for *Nightbreed* was really fun. *Darkman* is going to be another movie altogether, but I know Sam is going to make a really interesting movie. I don't think it's possible for him to make an uninteresting film.

Then it's back on the road with Oingo Boingo for a couple of months, hardcore performing, sweating every night. Then I have Tim Burton's new movie, *Edward Scissorhands*, waiting for me in the summer, and I'm looking forward to that. It's a very different story compared to *Batman*. Every film Tim has thrown at me so far has been a totally different score for me. That's the wonderful thing about Tim.

Even though certain relationships between some directors and composers are great, very often they do the same type of work together. The composer will do this type of score for this director. Which is not necessarily bad, for example what you have between John Williams and Spielberg: it's a certain thing they do well together. Bernard Herrmann and Alfred Hitchcock were like that. With Tim, I never know what to expect. Between *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*, *Beetlejuice* and *Batman* there were very few common links for me in any musical way. One was completely silly, European style; the other was wacky, over-the-top cartoon music and *Batman* was melodrama and darkly romantic lush themes, heroic themes.

I know whatever he gives me is going to go into some new area altogether. That's wonderfully exciting.

SOUND CHECK

Danny Elfman is one of the most highly regarded contemporary film composers. His scores for the Tim Burton movies *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* and, particularly, *Batman*, are reminiscent of the scores written by John Williams for *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* and *ET: The Extra-terrestrial* in terms of their stunningly individual themes and variations in tonality. However, Elfman is not averse to incorporating allusions to other films within his music. A recommended listening list (on compact disc, of course) includes:



BEETLEJUICE (Geffen, 1988)

A manic Romany romp through comic brass and percussion, Elfman's second team-up with director Tim Burton is a triumph. Harry Belafonte's recording of 'Day-O' bellies its use with a visual gag in the film, but clicks neatly into place amongst the other big band themes — along with 'Jump In Line', the only other lyricalised piece in the movie.



BATMAN (Warner Bros, 1989)

Elfman hits the big time with a grand Gothic score that should have been touted over the obnoxious rapping of the overrated, and overrated, Prince album. The vigorous central theme shares air time with the Joker's waddled march and the gentle, reflective love theme. Again, Elfman mixes his contemporary score with other memorable tracks. This time it's 'Beautiful Dreamer' which shows the sad, though mad, side to the Joker only hinted at in Sam Hamm's script. The soundtrack is performed by The Sinfonia Of London Orchestra.

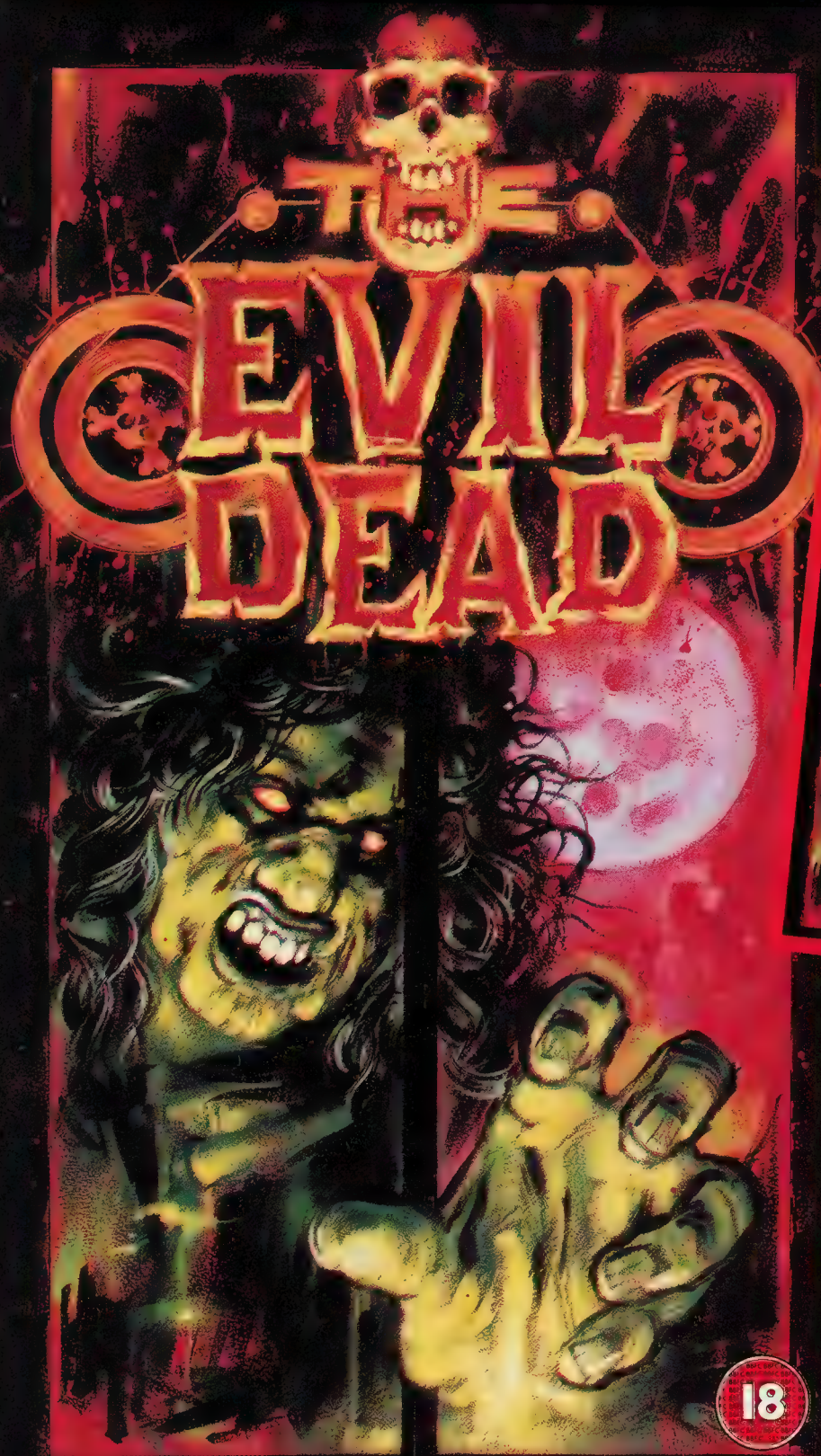


NIGHTBREED (MCA, 1990)

A dark, atavistic, almost carnal score with tribal nuances that, mixed with lighter shrills, portray the Breed as both brutish and sensitive. The reflections of past filmic scores are again there but, I suspect, Elfman has mixed in a few references to his own films (such as *Batman*) as well as Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*. *Nightbreed* ties in closely with *Batman* with its Gothic appeal, but it is more concentrated, with fewer themes. Magical and effective, it rates equal to *Batman* in my affections. The compact disc version contains a bonus vocal track, 'Country Skin'.

John Gilbert

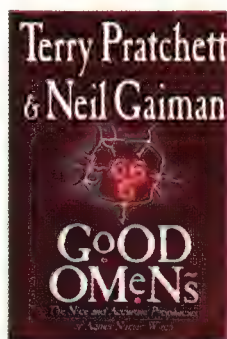
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DEATH AND THE MODEM



All right, so he's written fourteen books in the last seven years. Pyramids, the seventh Discworld novel, won the British Science Fiction Award for the best novel of 1989, and Gollancz have paid more for Good Omens — a collaboration with Neil Gaiman — than they've ever paid for a book before. But what has Terry Pratchett been doing lately? Colin Greenland finds out.



A monument to computerisation? Neil Gaiman (left) and Terry Pratchett, collaborators on *Good Omens*



Should I mention his top secret movie projects? Best not, Pratchett says. 'I could paper a wall with film offers I've had for my stuff — generally in the tone that you the humble author should be overjoyed they've even taken any notice of you, and therefore shouldn't complain that your arms and legs are about to be pulled off.'

Well, then, *apart* from finishing the ninth Discworld novel, *Moving Pictures*, and putting together the tenth (another one with Death as a central character, working title *Reaper Man*), he's completed the *Truckers* trilogy with *Wings*, a third book about the nomads, a race of little people searching for somewhere to live where humans won't bother them. 'The nomads are an idea I've had for twenty years,' he says. 'There was just this image of a lorry thundering through the night, with seven hundred tiny heads peering through the windscreen.'

'I've always been deeply fascinated by small worlds and fixed horizons. You can't have a smaller world than people living in a carpet.' He's referring to his first published novel, *The Carpet People*, which he wrote at the age of eighteen. 'There are ammonites around that still have a copy of it,' he says.

Pratchett: 'I was fed up with the Larry Niven-style clockwork world where all the technology works and the problems are all ones that human beings can sort out. I just wanted a bunch of zeebs who would do it all wrong'

Ten years later, in *Strata*, he had his first go at a planet with very peculiar horizons indeed: a flat Earth. 'I was fed up with the Larry Niven-style clockwork world where all the technology works and the problems are all ones that human beings can sort out. I just wanted a bunch of zeebs who would do it all wrong.'

The next time Pratchett designed a flat Earth, he called it the Discworld, and the leading zeeb was a spectacularly unimpressive wizard called Rincewind. The book was *The Colour Of Magic*, and the rest is history. Sort of. On the Discworld, where Pratchett takes the mickey out of myths and pretensions, history develops a distinct wobble.

Pyramids is about the Discworld version of Ancient Egypt, which is called Djelibeybi (try saying it aloud). 'It's got all the gags you know have to be there, from the sheer slapstick of the royal embalmers, Dil and Gern, who take the dead king to bits and stuff his body with straw and argue about which bandages he'd look best in, to the giant dung beetle that pushes the sun across the sky. Also, you have to put a P in front of any name that begins with a T, like Ptraci. Then there are the clever jokes, that are references to other things. There's a parody of a scene in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in there. It doesn't matter if people don't know the thing you're parodying, as long as the joke is funny in its own right.'

SODDING HOBBITS

With the Discworld, Pratchett has invented a friendly kind of satire that sets everyday people up against what he calls 'the consensus

fantasy universe. Frankly, *The Lord Of The Rings* would not have got off the ground if Frodo had said, 'Sod that for a lark, I'm not going. From my point of view, that's exactly the way you ought to start the story. And at the end, the industrial base of the continent, which is to say Mordor, has been ravaged, so no one's actually making anything any more; and you have bands of armed rogues of both sides running around the country. Sooner or later it'll dawn on them that all they've done is chop one another's limbs off in order to allow a load of sodding hobbits to fill the wilderness from one end to another with farms.'

That, according to Pratchett, is the model for the big fantasy book he intends to write after he's finished with the Discworld. Not that ten volumes have exhausted his interest: it's typical of this man that he's envisaging at least four more Discworld books, yet working on this next idea *already*. 'The Discworld is flexible enough that I can more or less do whatever I want in it. In *Moving Pictures*, which is coming out in November, it's the history of the cinema, which fits extremely well into a fantasy universe. All the while I want to do Discworld books, there are lots of people out there that want to read them, and that is a powerful incentive. But if I ever have to sit down and think, 'By Golly, I'd better write a

Discworld book, then that is the end.'

In fact, he says, the only problems with writing a series are continuity snags. 'The fans always spot them. They say: 'Why didn't he use the mystic ring? You clearly said in book three that anyone in possession of the mystic ring...' And you want to say: Because it was a different bloody book, that's why. I think it's unfair if someone buys a book and then realises, 'Christ, I've got five more to read before I understand what's happening on page one.'

Pratchett says he wrote *Sourcery* for all the fans who asked for another book about Rincewind. 'You have to be careful, though. They tell you Rincewind is their favourite character, but when you ask what their favourite book is, they say *Mort*, and he doesn't even appear in that. If I'd listened to them and done everything they said, I'd never have written the book they like best.'

SEVEN FOOT SKELETON

Terry's wife Lyn shares his copyrights and takes care of most of the flourishing Pratchett business, including fan mail. 'All the ones I don't have to see get saved up, until one morning I say, 'Right, I'm feeling fairly tough, bring on the cardboard box.' The idea for *Reaper Man* came in a letter from a fan who liked the character of Death, and said he could be her knight on a white charger any day of the week. Pratchett drums his fingers eagerly on the table, recalling the gleam of inspiration. 'I must dig out the letter and send her some flowers — probably dead ones with all the petals fallen off.'

Pratchett's own favourite character is Granny Weatherwax, but he has a few theo-



Gaiman: 'It's sometimes fun to throw an occasional Christian to the lions. The lions may be hungry too — you have to see both sides of these things'

ries about the popularity of Death. 'He never makes a gag, but the presence of an invisible seven-foot skeleton in any scene automatically makes it funny. He's a gentleman, he's not crude; he may well be implacable, though even that's not entirely the case. Death is the only character who appears in all the books — but a character who is identifiable even by the typography of his speech is such a marvellous device that you shouldn't use him too much.'

Death, inevitably, returns as one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in *Good Omens*, a sort of madcap farce in which a laid-back devil, a tarnished angel and a bizarre malassortment of humans contrive to stave off Armageddon. It was Neil Gaiman's idea originally. Gaiman, best known as the writer of the *Sandman* comics and the graphic novels *Violent Cases* and *Black Orchid*, calls himself 'one of Terry's beta-testers. He rings me up with two versions of a joke and says, 'Which is funnier?' The earliest chapters of *Pyramids* came from a conversation we had about a line in *Wyrd Sisters*, about the noises you can hear through the walls of the Assassins' Guild. We started bouncing ideas off each other about what it would be like to go to school there.'

DOG'S BREAKFAST

Another idea was Gaiman's: spoofing movies like *The Omen*, with the babies getting mixed up and the wrong parents going home with the Antichrist. 'I thought that was extremely good,' Pratchett recalls. 'About a year afterwards I said to him, 'Are you doing anything with it?' And he wasn't, so I said, 'Let's do it together.'

'It was fun, a sort of holiday job, because we were both doing other things as well. We stormed through the first draft in nine weeks, swapping discs through the post, and ringing one another up constantly. We had to sell it for a lot of money in order to pay the phone bills.'

Gaiman calls the project 'a monument to computerisation. We'd squirt stuff to each other via modems.'

'Actually, that was a real dog's breakfast,' reveals Pratchett cheerfully. 'We could have sneezed at each other in morse code, it would have been faster.'

Collaborating, they found they had some useful fascinations in common, like the Wicked Bibles, editions with misprints that make them sacrilegious. 'We did add to those a bit,' Pratchett confesses. 'I suspect the

Buggre Alle This Bible is going to get us burned,' he says casually.

'When either of us came up with a good gag, the other would automatically pick it up and run with it. Somebody had to sit down and bash out each actual bit, but it's very hard to remember which of us had each original idea.'

In disputes, Gaiman says, he tended to give Pratchett the casting vote. 'He's written more novels than I have. I was the apprentice, like the lad who comes round with the plumber. The plumber says, 'What you want there is a right-hand widget.' Then he goes off and has a smoke. I'd write something, then Terry would lean over my shoulder and say, 'Yes — now make it 5% funnier.' I felt quite proud of myself when I could make him laugh.'

KILLERS' CONVENTION

One reason Gaiman would never have finished *Good Omens* singlehanded is that comedy is only one thing he wants to write, and he didn't fancy being stereotyped as a 'humorous author' with his first novel. '*Sandman* is more typical of what I do. It can wander off into horror or comedy or pure fantasy. The highlight of the series so far has been an issue set at a serial killers' convention in an American motel, with discussion panels and a disco and attendees one-upping each other in the bar with tales of their methods and successes. It's macabre and sour, and definitely not funny. Says Gaiman: 'Whenever anything nasty or unfair happens in *Good Omens*, you can be fairly sure who wrote it — or any scene with sex in. Terry is very kind to all his characters. I'm not, particularly. It's sometimes fun to throw an occasional Christian to the lions. The lions may be hungry too — you have to see both sides of these things.'

So is *Good Omens* just farce, or is there some point to the provocation? 'It's a very moral book,' says Gaiman. 'Possibly an immoral moral book. It's about consequences. What people do is perhaps more important than what they believe.'

Pratchett agrees. 'Human beings are capable of being much worse than anything Hell can dream up; and of being much better than angels. Ultimately you take your own responsibility. You can't say, God told me to do this or the Devil made me do that; it's *you*, and all you've done is pin the responsibility on a third party. Even if there is a Satan, he doesn't go around telling people to dress up in funny clothes and molest children: that's people, doing that.'

Despite the current climate of religious hypersensitivity, Gaiman isn't expecting them to be dragged from their beds by a torch-bearing mob. There won't be a controversy, because of the marginalisation of humour and fantasy. *Good Omens* is every bit as serious in its intentions as *The Satanic Verses*, but it will disappear into the landscape. That's a major advantage of writing genre books, that society doesn't take you seriously. Comedy and science fiction can lob time-bombs into society which it will try to pretend aren't there. Think how many science fiction and horror books are essentially heretical.'

And what would Terry Pratchett say to marginalisation — to the hostile critic who scorns fantasy as essentially juvenile and escapist and fit only for the feeble-minded?

'As opposed to the dynamic, thrusting people who buy the beach books and the airport books that are so realistic? Good grief. What I would say is, Shut up.' He smiles sweetly. 'I would say, I shall buy the newspaper for which you work and I shall sack you.'

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Various poems, stories, articles and reviews in *Punch*, *Time Out*, *She*, *Penthouse*, etc.

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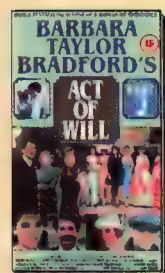
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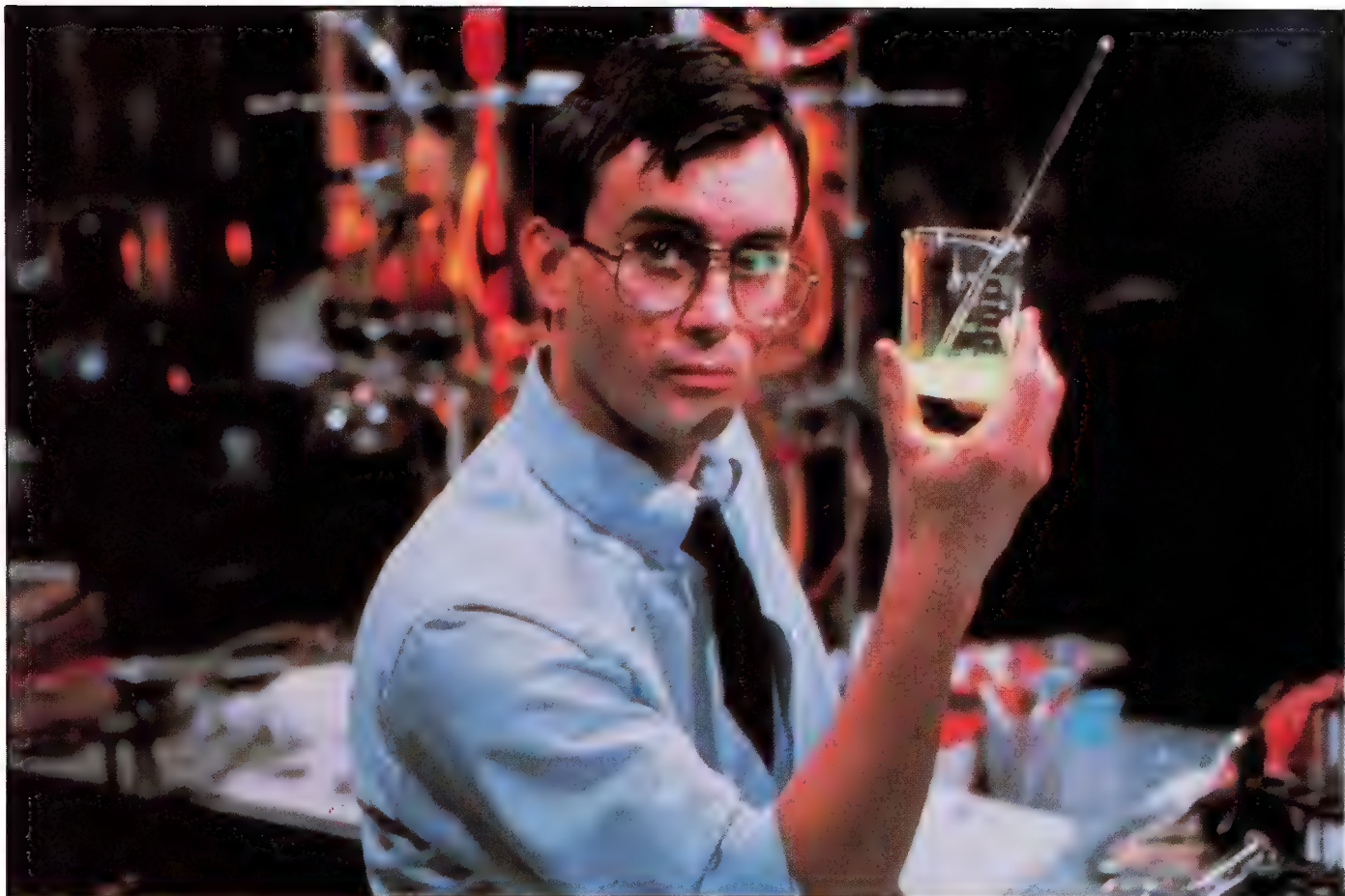


**BETTER
DEAD THA**



AN WED

When Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator* opened in 1985, it was described by a wit on *The Observer* as possessing 'a cheap smell of excess'. Other critics were hardly more flattering, but the audiences loved it. Now, Brian Yuzna brings us *Re-Animator 2*, which already seems to have attracted even more critical flak than its predecessor. **FEAR's** Mark Kermode compares the new movie with the original.



'In Re-Animator 2, the effects crew have set out to expand upon the gruesome pieces featured in Re-Animator, but the emphasis is on the fantastical rather than the gory nature of the revitalised flesh'



In 1922, a series of science-fiction/horror fantasies penned by Howard Phillips Lovecraft appeared in the cult magazine *Home Brew* under the inauspicious title of *Herbert West — Re-Animator*.

Largely ignored in his own lifetime, Lovecraft was to be hailed posthumously as an accomplished satirist and master of the macabre, his work musing upon the very nature of man's existence and freedom of will, whilst gleefully breaking taboos and wallowing disrespectfully in the darker side of human nature.

It was this formula which, in 1985, underwrote the cult horror movie *Re-Animator*, an extremely loose adaptation of Lovecraft's stories which attempted to update the author's anarchic humour and morbid mayhem for the modern cinema audience, stretching a low budget as far as it could go in its bid to challenge the modern boundaries of good taste.

Five years after producing *Re-Animator*, Brian Yuzna once again brings H P Lovecraft's classic tale of terror to our screens, this time handling directing as well as production chores. Originally entitled *Bride Of Re-Animator* (a fine monicker indeed), the new movie is being released in Britain as plain old *Re-Animator 2* due, one suspects, to the reservation of distributors Medusa concerning the cerebral powers of their target audience. Nevertheless, the sequel does indeed retread some of the themes of its 1935 namesake, *Bride Of Frankenstein* (dir James Whale), as well as its direct predecessor, attempting to blend weighty (if meandering) philosophy with oddball comedy and formulaic horror.





Deranged deity: Dr Herbert West (opposite page) and a mutant marriage (below) from *Re-Animator 2*; and the original *Re-Animator* (left)

OBSESSIVE LUST

For all the outré trappings of the original *Re-Animator*, director Stuart Gordon managed throughout to balance the upfront outrage with an intelligent and comedic exploration of the limits of rational behaviour, and the destructive power of an obsessive lust for a loved one's life, a theme upon which Yuzna has tried to expand in his sequel. In an efficiently understated early scene from *Re-Animator*, Dan Cane attempts hysterically to revive a young woman patient whose heart has failed. 'Your optimism is touching,' chides a fellow doctor, dragging Cain from his fruitless endeavours, 'but a good doctor knows when to stop.'

The scene is perversely repeated in *Bride Of Re-Animator*, as Cain once again fails to drag a beautiful patient back from the brink of death, despite tearing open her chest and performing frantic makeshift open heart surgery. Crucially, it is Gloria's lapse into lifelessness which now causes Cain to renew his necrophiliac activities with Herbert West, as they embark upon their most ambitiously futile project: to rebuild Cain's lost love Meg... from the heart outwards.

In attempting to recreate the success of *Re-Animator*, Yuzna has managed to round up many of the original collaborators, most notably actors Jeffrey Combs and Bruce Abbott who star as Herbert West and Dan Cain, as well as David Gale, who returns as the severed head of the maniacal Dr Hill. Perhaps more significantly, composer Richard Band, whose ominously quirky and virtually uninterrupted score lent *Re-Animator* its blackly comic edge, has been enlisted to orchestrate *Re-Animator 2*, which unlike its predecessor is more selfconsciously ponderous and presumptuous.

'Horror is biological, terror is psychological', offers Yuzna by way of explanation, suggesting that *Bride* is intended as a cerebral rather than a visceral assault upon the senses. Nevertheless, Yuzna has not forgotten his own oft quoted maxim that to be successful, a horror movie must be prepared to go '10 per cent over the edge', and thus the latex excesses of effects wiz Screaming Mad George feature prominently in this sequel alongside the work of Robert Kurtzman, Greg Nicotero and Howard Berger's KNB EFX team.

Nodding politely in the direction of the original, the effects crew have set out to expand upon many of the gruesome pieces featured in *Re-Animator*, but the emphasis is on the fantastical rather than the gory nature of the revitalised flesh, as Dr West gets to work with 'whole parts' for the first time: the severed head of Dr Hill thus sprouts batwings, becoming an airborne angel of death; fingers are grafted onto eyeballs creating an impressively stop-framed super-spider; and dismembered limbs become autonomously animated (and frequently comical) contorted creations, the rebellious bastard children of the deranged deity of Dr Herbert West.





'The reborn bride resembles something from a Clive Barker movie, her enticingly peeled-back skin and diagrammatically muscular anatomy evoking more a sense of perverse beauty than of over-the-edge, gross-out gore'

DEAD TISSUE

The creation and rejection of life by an imperfect God is indeed a theme which Yuzna describes as central to twentieth century existentialist thinking. Whilst in *Re-Animator* West exclaims: 'We can defeat death', the director's ambitious storyline for *Bride* (made flesh by scriptwriters Woody Keith and Rick Fry, the writers of *Society*) finds the good doctor attempting to create life itself, constructing the ideal woman from an amalgam of used body parts: the feet of a ballet dancer, the arms of a waitress, the womb of a virgin... 'Just dead tissue', breathes West ominously, 'but in our hands, the clay of life'. In keeping

with Yuzna's desire to shift the ground from ballsy horror-comedy to satirical burlesque fantasy, the reborn bride (a make-up cocooned Kathleen Kinmont) resembles something from a Clive Barker movie, her enticingly peeled-back skin and diagrammatically muscular anatomy evoking more a sense of perverse beauty than of over-the-edge, gross-out gore.

Going 'over the edge' was indeed the area in which *Re-Animator* excelled, both in its scrungy special effects and in its deliberately tasteless humour — most obviously the notorious 'head giving head' sequence, which was trimmed for the cinemas and ousted com-

pletely on video. Ironically, when Yuzna came to produce *Re-Animator* for Empire Pictures, his main worry was that the picture might not go far enough. In financial terms, a high gore factor was essential to guarantee box office returns; working on the basis that, even if the movie's overt themes and blackly satirical subtexts didn't work, grue merchants would still hand over their hard-earned dollars if fleshy fun was on the menu.

Director Stuart Gordon soon allayed Yuzna's fears. From the pre-credits eye-bursting death of Doctor Gruber to the intestinal explosions of the climactic morgue massacre, *Re-Animator* delivered the requisite latex rompings with plenty to spare, and the audiences loved it. Whether or not Yuzna's sequel will succeed in recapturing this warm reception, and in breathing new life into this long dead corpse, remains to be seen.

Down in the lab, the team of scientists have been meticulously mixing up the re-agent, repeating the experiment, preparing to revitalise the monster...

'A good doctor knows when to stop...' 'Or does he?'



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GRAPHIC DE



TAIL

Bats and babies, Asimov and Akira, mutants and Mrrungo-Mu... Warren Lapworth grabs a handful of the latest comics and graphic novels.

With *The Punisher* movie finally at our shores, Marvel UK are making one of the skull-chested vigilante's earlier graphic novels readily available. At a mere £5.50, *Assassin's Guild* buys you 64 pages of violence shown in graphic detail (of course), if a little scruffily, and mixed with standard New York gangland rivalry.

A STRYKE FOR MINORITY FREEDOM?

A time warp for those moody mutants, the X-Men, going back to their 1982 line-up of Cyclops, Wolverine, Nightcrawler, Storm, Ariel (now named Shadowcat and joining Nightcrawler in *Excalibur*), Colossus and Professor Xavier for a reprint of the *God Loves, Man Kills* saga (Marvel, £5.50). High-profile evangelist the Reverend William Stryker carries his crusade beyond religion and God's teachings to hit out against mutants such as the X-Men, social misfits he sees as evil. He captures Cyclops, Storm and Xavier and connects the Prof to a machine that will amplify his telepathic powers and, corrupted by

brainwashing techniques, destroy mutants all over the globe.

Then as now, Chris Claremont is fond of tales that show the oppression his mutant minority face, a direct comparison with the racial prejudice of real life. By mixing social statement with fun superhero action, he avoids political overkill. Brent Anderson's good but sometimes vague art is helped considerably by Steve Oliff's tasteful, considered colouring and matches the gratifyingly thoughtful mainstream tale.

BOBBY AND BEEBE BOOMER'S BABY

And now for some light relief, with Piranha's *Invaders From Hornw* (£1.60, import). At nearly 40, Bobby Boomer is shocked by his wife Beebe's announcement that she is pregnant. He seeks comfort from his buddies, Reggie, Bert, Beano and a cigar-smoking duck (nope, not Howard). This doesn't stop him having a vivid dream involving space aliens and a banana, and Bobby's convinced that the baby will be the love child of an extra terrestrial.

John Blair Moore, who has obviously modelled Bobby on himself, has a pleasingly active style of art which, although derivative of common humour styles, keeps you reading. Which is just as well, because his writing isn't actually funny. It'll bring a smile or two to your lips, granted, but you won't laugh at Bobby's exploits, and the frequent scene changes are unhelpful. There are five issues of *Invaders* to follow, but I shan't be bothering with them.

called trimanium, but ever-improving mining techniques have had an undesirable effect on the population — physical contact between Datugadians causes them to spontaneously combust!

The crew of the *Enterprise* have been enlisted to help preserve the race by gathering the necessary samples to produce test-tube Datugadians, and by relocating offspring. A native politician, Shelm, objects to genetic engineering and he and his followers cause problems. Sulu has problems of his own with an old flame, who happens to be heading the medical project.

As could be expected in a story co-written by Takei (with Peter David), Sulu is the character who takes the spotlight in the annual, which makes a change from Kirk, Spock and Bones but soon becomes tiresome; he never had sufficient depth of character to justify real attention. Visually Sulu is handicapped by Gray Morrow's simplistic, scruffy art. The story is almost as basic, and corny sentimentality further hampers enjoyment. Only Trekkies need beam aboard.

CARD IN A SIN

Comic books generally celebrate their fiftieth issues and multiples thereafter with some sort of special, attention-grabbing plot. So, *Batman* (50p) celebrates its 450th issue with the return of The Joker (excuse me while I nod off). A particularly severe judge is found hanged, with a jocular note pinned to him, then a meeting of financial big-wigs is interrupted by the arrival of some wild dogs. The Joker and his henchmen. But a lonely man greets reports of the crimes with anger, feeling that The Joker's name is being taken in vain...

Artwork is standard, unremarkable comic illustration (appropriately) but Marv Wolfman's story is less easily read (no pun intended), issue 450 being just part one. Certainly The Joker is a dreary and predictable choice of villain for a commemorative issue but with the mystery man scorning him as a fake, there's plenty of scope for a memorable adventure.

REACHING ESCAPE VELOCITY...

It's becoming quite a trend to convert known fantasy/sci-fi authors' short stories into comic strip format and to gather them into limpback mini-anthologies. *Orbit* (Eclipse Books, £3.50, import) is the latest, its selling point being that each story featured was once published in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*.

Indeed, each issue will lead with a story by Asimov himself, *Nothing For Nothing* opening the first *Orbit*. Diplomatic aliens are in orbit around Stone Age Earth and although most of them want to pass it by, the Explorer alien is fascinated by it and its inhabitants. What can the thuggish humans possibly offer the aliens? And what can the advanced extra terrestrials offer in return? Well the story doesn't come up with the goods, for a start off, but John Bolton's art is excellent. Aliens are a bit tacky-looking but the dream-like haze that everything is viewed through is highly atmospheric.

Ginny Sweetlips' Flying Circus travels inside a van and offers tacos, 'dangerous drugs' and seven

minutes of sexual ecstasy with Ginny in her cheerleader, nurse or schoolteacher guises. Ginny and her clients live in a grim, dusty future Earth but it's impossible to sympathise with any character and there's simply not enough story. This latter complaint can be levelled at *Fermi And Frost*, in which a doctor takes a boy to the safety of Iceland as a nuclear war begins. Both stories have high quality, richly coloured art but ultimately lack feeling.

BIGGER IN JAPAN

Neo-Tokyo, 2030, a wasteland following a thermo-nuclear explosion which may still prove to be the strike which triggers World War IV. *Akira* (£2.50, import) is named after a telekinetic child of incalculable power and sets a group of young friends, part of an underground resistance movement, against the forces of the tyrannical Colonel. In issue 20, *Revelations*, Kay has a tough time getting the injured Masura to safety while Tetsuo confers with the mysterious Lady Miyako, a trainer of psychics.

Akira, written and drawn by Katsuhiro Otomo, is a strange collection of ideas, mixing the dirty, rubble-strewn streets of a grim city devastated by war with the soothing temples of ancient Japan. Characters fit this pattern also, the Colonel's savage thugs contrasting with the serene, meditative Lady Miyako. Indeed, it's her philosophical words which are the focus of this issue, with fast-paced action filling in the gaps.

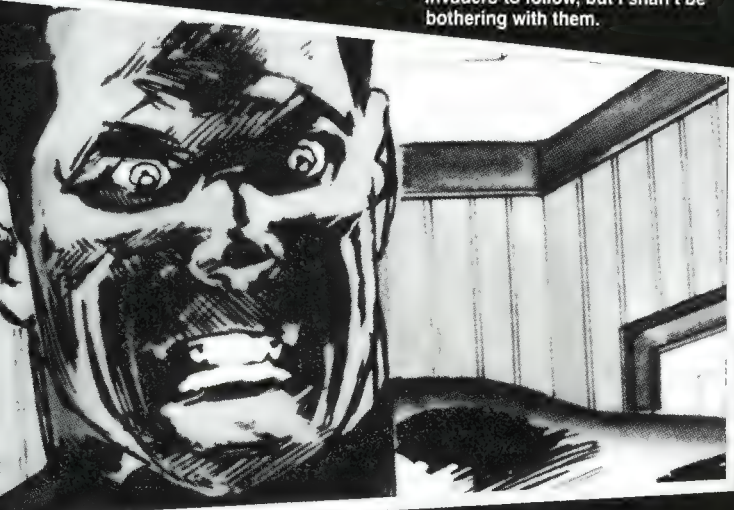
Art is typically Japanese, full of characteristic disproportioned cute faces but with more detail and shading. Grimy colour fits the future Tokyo excellently and rounds off *Akira's* professional production very nicely. One of the best bookshelf format series around.

THE ENSLAVERS

Galactus' famous ex-herald, the Silver Surfer, faces one of his greatest challenges yet in *The Enslavers* (Marvel, £10.50). The Earth's superheroes have been captured by the armoured soldiers of the Enslaver race, led by the loathsome omnipotent Mrrungo-Mu. Such is his arrogance that he invites several of them to attack him simultaneously — and wins easily, which is a bit bizarre as one of the heroes is Rogue, who can absorb the powers of anyone she touches. But I digress...

As Mrrungo-Mu's vast space station approaches the Earth so that it may gather the entire human race to absorb as fuel, his girlfriend flees. The Surfer, searching for his beloved Shalla-Bal, rescues her just as she's being captured by an Enslaver ship. Thus our shiny hero discovers Mrrungo-Mu's plan and must devise a way to stop the all-powerful slob.

Written by the great Stan Lee in 1980, the story which has finally appeared in print, he informs us in a wafflesome outro, is quite different from the one plotted ten years ago. Probably just as well because although he's good at created characters his stories are now old hat. However, *The Enslavers* remains a traditional shock-horror superhero yarn matched by Keith Pollard's bright, lively visuals. It's fun, entertaining but, though hardback, it's overpriced.



■ Clockwise: The Silver Surfer from *The Enslavers*; Lady Miyako and the eponymous Akira; The Punisher in *Assassin's Guild*; *Nothing For Nothing*, an Asimov story from *Orbit*; and Charles Xavier crucified in *X-Men*

SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE

The telly series may be as old as the hills, and the actors even older, but DC have only just produced the first *Star Trek* annual (£1.60). It's co-written by George Takei, who played Sulu in the series, and presents the dilemma of the inhabitants of Datugad. This planet is the key supplier of a cheap yet efficient fuel

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FICTION FILE 4 KATHERINE KERR



American writer Katherine Kerr, whose *Dragonspell* was published recently, has a fascination with all things Celtic that goes beyond her surname. Here she talks to John Gilbert about magic, mud, and the human capacity for flight...

I was very tired of people being portrayed as clean and nice and kind when the average death-age of someone in the Dark Ages was 25,' says Katherine Kerr. She gives this as one of the main reasons for writing the sequence of fantasy novels that comprise *Daggerspell*, *Darkspell*, *Dawnspell* and *Dragonspell*. Despite her schooling in classical archaeology, Medieval and Dark Ages history, she describes herself as 'an impassioned amateur. But I did want to do it right. My pet peeve is books that mix up Irish and Welsh names all in the same family, so I wanted to make sure that this was a unified language as well as a unified book. I hate twee. That's why I have the wildfolk picking their toes and doing nasty things. I'm damned if I'll make them twee.'

Her view of magic as a system is also unique amongst fantasy writers. She believes that magic and science can coexist, even within fiction, but that the former should not be a complete alternative to the latter. 'Consider magic as a system of getting in touch with unconscious parts of your own personality, and relating those to the

universe at large. But if you consider magic as a substitute technology... well, look what happened... it didn't work.

'It is entirely possible, if you train your mind, to feel that you are flying as a large bird over an imaginary inner landscape, in such a way that you would swear it was real if you didn't know better. So that is the dividing line between reality and fantasy.'

She also believes that fantasy fiction can be used to explain or portray complex, esoteric ideas. 'It could be, it doesn't have to be; for me it is. It's a way of presenting these ideas and images. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I've tried to influence people, but I wouldn't mind if they took it a little more seriously. It does have its own truth, its own validity. For instance, when you turn lead into gold, it's your own personality that's being transmuted, it's not this lump of metal sitting here in the recorder.

'In America, the idea of an inner life is a very strange one. Very few people even realise that you can have an inner life. You hear people dismiss things, saying, 'Oh, that's only psychology', as if psychology didn't play a part in World War II and the whole Nazi movement, and killed millions. It's not a part of American culture, and so trying to make people look is my goal.'

Kerr intends to continue the work on her Celtic fantasies, producing a new series which takes the Spell books into a wide-ranging far future where her original characters are looked upon as almost mythical beings.

She is also writing science fiction which will mix mind with hardware. 'What we're dealing with here is psionics and that whole strand of science fiction. Psionics is one of those places where fantasy and science fiction should overlap. We're dealing with the literature of marvels. Fantasy and science fiction are too much alike.'

THE LAST ACT IN THE DRAMA OF WORLD WAR II

JOHN
BRUNNER



By the time they adjourned from the dinner table to the drawing room for brandy and a smoke, the five businessmen were chatting with unusual freedom. Four of them were British. They had known each other, more or less well, for several years, but they were in disparate fields and had never before confided so openly in one another about their plans and disappointments.

The fifth man — for the sake of whom the dinner had been arranged — was American. None of the Britons had met him before except the host, and he only by chance at an international trade conference. At first, conscious that this was no mere pleasant social gathering, he had been wary; however, as the evening progressed and he realised that he was in the presence of people who had suffered the same sort of humiliation as himself, he had relaxed... and perhaps applied himself rather too freely to the excellent wines he was plied with. Now, clasping a glass of Armagnac and a large Havana cigar, he looked like the most relaxed of the five, leaning back in his leather chair with legs outstretched, tie

and collar loose, and face more than a trifle flushed.

Still he was saying relatively little. The others had long needed this opportunity to pour out their accumulated grievances, and were taking full advantage.

As they did so, however, his eyes were roaming the room, taking in detail after detail and adding them to others he had noted earlier.

The subject of discussion varied, but always reverted to the same theme. Now the four Britons, two chairmen, two managing directors, of major manufacturing companies, were complaining about the obstinacy of trades unions; now, about governmental inability to stem the decline of the country's industry. But ever and again they harked back to those whom they regarded as the villains of the piece: the people who had invaded their traditional overseas markets, then had the temerity — the gall — the naked brass, as one of them put it who had not forgotten his childhood in a Lancashire textile town, to establish first a bridgehead, then a virtual monopoly, in Britain itself, in that green and pleasant land whose countryside, in the shape of a hundred-acre estate landscaped and beautified by the famous Capability Brown, surrounded the splendid mansion where they had come together.

'The two of them cast an accusing glance at the host, as though suspecting him of luring them under false pretences'

At the conclusion of a particularly virulent tirade, the host declared, "They might as well have won the bloody war, mightn't they?"

The American stirred with a grimace. He said, "They did."

"Come now!" — bluffly from the Lancashireman. His firm had once enjoyed world leadership in spinning and weaving machines; now it was reduced to importing and distributing cheaper and more efficient equipment from the Far East. "You aren't here to preach despair, y'know!"

"Look around you," the American invited. "Look at the television; it's

by Hitachi, right? The stereo — that's by Pioneer, and I see most of the tapes are labelled TDK. And didn't I pass a Datsun 280Z in the driveway?"

The host, who had been chairman of a moribund car-maker and now presided over a firm processing non-ferrous metals, said defensively, "It's my wife's."

"Wife-schmife," the American said, reaching to tap ash from his Corona. "They got to you, same as they got to us. I hate to buy Japanese, but I do, and so do my kids. Hell, my youngest daughter wants to learn the koto!"

"Still," said the third Briton judiciously — his line had been shipbuilding, but his company, leaner by three thousand workers, was now at the tail-end of its last contract, for part, not even the whole, of a North Sea oil-rig and was at risk of being completely wound up — "one would have thought that with its colossal resources the United States could have put up a better show. One knows that discriminatory tariffs have their drawbacks, but did you really need Japanese military and naval bases so badly that you couldn't apply the pressure necessary to make the so-and-sos balance their import-export figures?"

The American snorted and seemed about to say something, but changed his mind and took a swig of brandy instead.

The fourth man, younger than the others, gazed down musingly into his own glass. His computer company had rocketed within three years nearly to the top of the *Financial Times* share index, then slid back almost as rapidly. He said, "A lot of it is our own fault, I think. I mean, one knows how the Japanese hide behind the smokescreen of their language, for example. Didn't they make a fatal mistake during the war, when they went on using naval codes they knew had been compromised because they were sure no Westerner could grasp the subtleties of Japanese?"

"True," the American confirmed. "Nonsense, of course. Within six months of the attack on Pearl Harbor we'd trained our interpreters so well they could interrogate prisoners in their own language. And then we turned the tables by using Navaho radio operators, having figured out there

couldn't be more than about point-one of a Japanese who understood a word of it." He chuckled throatily.

"Bears out my point," Computers said. "If I'd had my wits about me, instead of going for expansion the way I did, I'd have hired a couple of bright young men — they'd have had to be men, given what I'm told about the Japanese attitude to women — put them through a crash course in Japanese and sent them to open an on-site agency for us."

"Wouldn't have done you a blind bit of good," said the American. "Any more than it did us."

There was a pause. At length Textile Machinery said, "I thought we were invited to meet you because you'd had a lot of success in the Japanese market. To be honest, I came here hoping to pick your brains."

"Not to put too fine a point on it," said Shipbuilding, "I did the same." The two of them cast an accusing glance at the host, as though suspecting him of luring them under false pretences.

"That's precisely what I was hoping for," the latter confirmed, and added to the American, "I trust I didn't misunderstand what you said to me at that conference —"

"Hell, no!" The American's cigar, neglected a moment too long, had gone out; he relit it, and the glimmer of the flame reflected in perspiration on his forehead. "But that's all in the past, practically ancient history. Why do you think I'm in Europe, the second-best market, 'stead of over there in Asia where the real action is? You know what my line is, don't you?"

They had been too diffident to ask in so many words; they left a reply to the host. After an embarrassed pause he said, "After our first meeting I made inquiries, and established that yours had been almost the only foreign company with so admirable a sales record in Japan. I thought, since you said yourself you'd decided to retire, you wouldn't mind passing on a few wrinkles. After all — well, "special relationship" and all that." He ended on a tone that sounded more like special pleading.

"Typical!" said the American contemptuously. "Typical! Think I didn't do my groundwork? Think I don't know by heart what you lot are worth, individually and collectively? The moment I heard who I was going to meet, I got one

of my staff to research the lot of you. You make me mad, know that? All of you had terrific products same as my corporation did, and all of you have knuckled under without anything like the same excuse!

He glared at them; they shifted uncomfortably in their chairs.

'Your excuse being —?' said Textile Machinery, the bluntest of the company.

'Ah, shit.' The American emptied his brandy-balloon and held it out for refilling; the host obliged. 'You don't know what my line is — I mean was — do you? So I'll have to goddamn well tell you! My people make the best electronic equipment for the nuclear industry, for every branch of it from regular power-plants to making bombs! And we fucking lost out! Pardon, as I gather you Limeys say, my French!'

He gulped angrily at his replenished drink. The others hung on his words with frozen attention; maybe this was what they had come to hear.

But when nothing more was forthcoming, Computers said diffidently, 'I wouldn't have thought there was that much of a market for your kind of product over there. I was under the impression that not only were they banned from getting into that area, but there was a sort of national bias against it, owing to what happened at Hiroshima.'

'Oh, sure!' The American's tone mingled bitterness with mockery. 'Tell your average man in the street — your guy on the Tokyo subway — what went on, and he'd practically faint with shock! Yeah, that's true enough. But... Well, you said we needed our bases there, and when push came to shove... Besides, there was a hell of a lot of money involved.'

'In what?' said the host softly, speaking for them all.

For a while the American didn't reply. At long last, though, he heaved a sigh, setting by his glass and his cigar. To himself he muttered, 'Does it make any odds if I open my big mouth? It's been a long time — more'n ten years — and I got kicked in the kishkas anyhow, by those bastards in the State Department. What the hell?'

He sat bolt upright. 'Okay! You asked for it! I'll tell you what I think! I don't have a shred of

evidence, but I've been suspecting this for so long, and it's the only explanation that fits all the facts.' He glared about him, eyes as much reddened by the drink as was the rest of his face.

'So I'll just lay down the facts, and leave you to judge whether my crazy notion matches them. Fact: suddenly in the middle Sixties we were able to sell one hell of a lot of nuclear-related electronics gear to Japan. Fact: we had to get special clearance from Washington for some of the items involved, but they said it was for pure research and we were allowed to go ahead. Fact: I went to Japan once a year

"Typical!" said the American contemptuously. 'Think I didn't do my groundwork? Think I don't know by heart what you lot are worth, individually and collectively?'"

for six years and they treated me like a king. Fact: in the early Seventies I went back and suddenly nobody wanted to know; I didn't even get cuddled through customs and immigration like before. Instead of sending top brass with a limousine they sent a junior clerk and we had to stand outside the airport building trying to flag a cab.

'Fact: the bottom fell out of our deal with not a word of warning. For the next six months I couldn't even get the bastards to answer a letter! When finally they did, they said our gear wasn't up to their requirements, goodbye! Or maybe take a running jump would be more like!'

Computers failed to suppress a low whistle, and followed it with a generous swig of brandy.

'Catching on, are you?' said the American sourly. 'But don't interrupt me. I haven't filled in all the background yet.'

'Three years go by, okay? This is when there's all this international pressure on the Japs to reduce their exports or at least lower their tariffs to let more foreign products in. They play the regular politeness game, making all kinds

of promises and then going off to snigger behind their hands at the ass-headedness of the round-eyes. That's what they call us when they're not dismissing us as *gaijin*, ignorant foreign bastards.

'And then the pressure stops. Not all at once. By degrees. But pretty fast nonetheless. You noticed?'

His question was met by unison nods.

'So did we. Boy, did we ever!' Hand by now shaking, he swigged still more brandy, groped for his cigar and found it had gone out again, and crushed it angrily into the ashtray. 'Corporation after company after corporation bit the dust because the Japs moved in on what had been their territory —, but I don't have to tell you that! You've seen the results. You've suffered them, same as us. Right?'

Once more there was a pause. The host said at length, 'We were, I think, hoping to hear something we didn't know. Of course, you have already explained something about your access to the Japanese market, but —'

'You mean I haven't added the clincher to my story?' was the grunted answer. 'Ah, hell. It's so goddamn far out —'

'We feel pretty far out,' said Computers. 'Not waving but drowning. Anybody who can make sense of this lunatic situation where all of us have products that ought to be selling worldwide if only on a basis of quality rather than mere volume — where the nation with the most massive economic muscle in the whole of history seems simply to have thrown in the towel when faced on an economic level with an enemy it roundly defeated in war —'

'That's right!' rumbled Textile Machinery, leaning forward with elbows on knees, glass cradled in his large, mechanic's hands. 'I've long suspected that we were never told the full story.'

The others signified agreement, and waited.

'Okay,' said the American at last. 'But if my guess is right, it won't do any of us any good. I said something like that already, didn't I? Man, you serve one hell of a fierce brandy! I'm not sure what I already said and what I left out... Oh, yeah.' He licked his lips and gathered his powers of concentration.

'I meant to add one more fact. Which is as follows. On a certain



day, right about the time when the pressure came off Japan like I mentioned, the Japanese ambassador in Washington asked for — what's it called? Like when you go to see the queen?"

'Audience,' the host supplied.

'Right. An audience. He got it. He and the president were together for about an hour. Afterwards it was panic stations. Make what you can of that!'

With an air of finality he leaned back and drained his glass again.

There was an interlude of uncertainty. At last the host said, 'Are we to assume that the ambassador voiced some kind of threat?'

'My God!' the American exploded. 'If you can see to the heart of the matter that quickly, why the hell is your country running down the way it is? If you're that sharp, you ought to be right on top of the heap!' He mastered his excitement, adding in a dour tone, 'I don't

'The American fixed him with a stony, red-rimmed gaze. 'Ever been to Japan?''

imagine you can say what kind of threat?'

'I wouldn't dare,' said the host. 'I don't imagine any of us would. Please spell it out.'

The American leaned back, setting his elbows on the arms of his chair, his fingertips together, his gaze on the opposite wall — where, as it happened, was hung a Japanese scroll depicting three birds on a branch of autumn maple — and cogitated for a moment. Eventually he said, as though against his will:

'Well, just suppose that when the ambassador called at the Oval Office, his message went this way. "Honourable President, at the end of what you call the Second World War our divine emperor was obliged to order his troops to discontinue combat when you sneaky less-than-human ordure hit us below the belt with atom bombs instead of fighting like the heirs of the noble samurai. It is my pleasant, indeed satisfying duty to inform you that the Land of the Rising Sun has disposed a considerable number of remote-controlled nuclear devices — which as you doubtless know can now be

made small enough for one man to carry — in various of your ports where our ships call: as it might be, though this is not in any sense an assurance or a promise, in Seattle, the home of the Boeing Company, and in San Francisco Bay, and San Diego, the naval base, and Galveston, the oil port, and New Orleans, and maybe in the East River off Manhattan — "'

Thus far they had heard him out incredulously, but that was too much for Textile Machinery. He jolted forward.

'I never heard such nonsense! Nobody could dream of such a thing!'

The American fixed him with a stony, red-rimmed gaze.

'Ever been to Japan?'

'Well' — uncomfortably — 'no, I must admit I haven't.'

'I was there five years. 1945 to 1950, with MacArthur. I was a brash young shavetail, proud of how much I knew about the country from the books I'd read, the training course I'd been put through that made me an interrogator like your pal here' — a nod at Computers — 'talked about. The first time I told a Japanese that the soup he called *potaju* was invented by the French, he froze me out. Don't tell a Jap that when he fries a mess of scrambled eggs and calls it *omeretsu* it started as an omelette. It may be true; it doesn't make a spark of difference in his mind.

'And never tell them they lost World War II. Because they didn't.'

His voice rose in a crescendo.

'They just went on with it after we quit! And in the Nineteen-Seventies they fucking won!'

'I never heard anything so ridiculous!' shouted Textile Machinery, forcing his considerable bulk upright.

'Have it your way,' said the American, trying to do the same and failing in an alcoholic haze. 'Oh, shit. I must be drunk. I haven't been this drunk since I was in school. Would someone call my driver? I have to catch a plane to Bonn tomorrow.'

'Listen, will you?' Textile Machinery was bending over him, his incipient dewlaps purple with drink and fury. 'I expected you to give us sound advice, not spin some sort of crazy yarn about —'

The American mastered himself unexpectedly: rose, albeit swaying, and pushed the Englishman aside.

'You find a better explanation and I'll listen to it!' he husked. 'I'm out of it! I quit! Not quite in time — I wound up half a million short of what I could have had if I'd caught on a little sooner — but I did have the sense to get out! You wanted my advice? You're welcome to it! Sell out and run away, or else they'll get you by the short and curlies too! Maybe they already did! For all I know there's a bomb of theirs in Port of London!'

While the company remained stunned, the host's butler, an oriental, appeared at the door.

'The American gentleman's driver is bringing his car around, sir,' he intoned.

The American gentleman looked at him. Abruptly he uttered something in a language the others could not understand, but the butler reacted as though he had received an electric shock. Traditionally attired in neat black jacket and grey trousers, his white shirt partly obscured by a waistcoat striped in black and dull gold, he linked his hands, bowed, scuffed his feet... all in a posture of complete and instinctive subservience.

'Was that Japanese?' the host rasped. 'But Theodore is Filipino!' 'Tagalog it wasn't!' mocked the American. 'I hit him with the form they reserve for animals and army recruits. It makes the words sound like gobs of spit. You heard!'

In drunken triumph he swept out, with the butler following in haste to open the front door. In the drawing room — which had seemed only suitably dim for an after-dinner conversation, but felt abruptly very dark — four of Britain's top industrialists stared at one another, seeking consolation and reassurance...

And found none.



JOHN BRUNNER is the consummate British science fiction author. His novels, *The Compleat Traveller In Black*, *The Shift Key* and *The Shockwave Rider* have just been republished in paperback by Mandarin, and his prodigious short story output includes *An Entry That Did Not Appear In The Domesday Book* (from the *Pendragon Chronicles* anthology, published by Robinson last month).

The Diary of Harold James Loman

By Peter J Baker

A diary is an interesting piece of literature. Some say it's a bit like having a close personal friend to whom you can confide your innermost feelings. Maybe having a personal diary can be a form of therapy, allowing people to write down, and see in black and white, the apprehensions that are hidden deep within us all. Sometimes, diaries are specifically written in the hope of imparting some form of wisdom or philosophy to a future generation. And yet, as I have discovered, they can also be written to warn a future population that there exist on this earth such horrors that no one could believe them possible.

The story I am about to recount comes from the diary of one Harold James Loman. It is a warning.

Before I begin my narrative, let me first tell you the circumstances that brought about my possession of such a strange confession. The book was entangled in the roots of an old tree I was in the process of digging out from my back yard. I had not long purchased this particular property, and had decided to clear the place of unwanted trees and shrubs. I must confess, I had never before seen anything to resemble this strange growth of nature.

It stood about seven feet in height; its trunk was not straight like most other trees, but bent and distorted. Large

grotesque lumps protruded along the length of the thick black form. Solid-looking branches jutted out from either side of the trunk, and the foliage was a dirty brown colour and grew in sparse clumps. On removing a small section of the hard surrounding bark with the aid of a sharp axe, a strange dark reddish sap, thick and foul-smelling, oozed from within the tree's inner core.

As I was in the process of digging out this strange, unknown perennial plant, I came across the diary of Harold James Loman. The book was completely enclosed in a living sarcophagus of roots, almost as if the tree had grown out of the manuscript itself; slowly winding around it, and encasing it in a dark, airtight tomb of wood. It was only when I broke off some of the roots with my spade that I happened to discover this curious legacy of the departed man in question.

I glanced at some of the pages, and eventually became so engrossed with his bizarre and frightening account that I was unable to put it down; not even for a moment.

Even now, after having read this poor man's story, I am unsure whether his account of the events leading up to his horrible demise is real, or the invented fiction of a madman. I will let you decide, as I convey to you the words written within the diary of Harold James Loman.

MARCH 12th. 1968.

This is the diary of Harold James Loman. 48 years old. A woodcutter by trade, and a doomed man.

I have decided to write this story while I still can. As each hour passes, I feel my strength fading as I move towards my inevitable death. I can only hope and pray that my demise, when it comes, will be final. Yet I fear I will be doomed to an existence so horrific, and that who ever finds and reads this account of my last days will not believe it to have been written by a person of sound mind. Please believe that, at this moment, I am sane, for as each hour passes I know my state of mind moves towards the other extreme.

My story begins six days ago, on the morning of March 6th.

I was in the process of searching for good quality timber to fill an order for a small privately-owned timber yard. Good large trees of high standard were becoming hard to find. I found myself investigating a section of dense forest that I had never visited before. My search led me down to the bottom of a deep ravine with large, sheer cliffs on either side. The trees in this area were amazing, the like of which I can only remember having seen as a child, when my father took me on some of his timber-cutting expeditions. And yet these trees appeared to be much larger and taller than any I had ever seen before. The deeper I advanced into this uncharted area, the more its appearance changed. The landscape was beginning to look like that of a primordial rainforest, untouched from the beginning of time. There were plants, bushes and shrubs I had never seen before. Thick vines entwined themselves around the limbs and branches of the huge trees; the rope-like tentacles hung down to the ground, as if waiting to snatch up any unsuspecting prey that walked within reach.

The feeling of awe that had overcome me when I first entered this place now became one of fear and isolation. I felt a terrible uneasiness, as if this strange forest was alive, and watching my every move.

As I turned to follow the path by which I had come, I noticed what appeared to be a clearing off to my right. After pushing and shoving

my way through a variety of bushes, vines and creepers, I found myself standing at the edge of a treeless, grassy meadow, about the size of a football field. To my surprise, a small cabin stood like an alien sentinel in the middle of the clearing. From a distance, the cabin appeared to be well kept, its walls were built from logs, probably from the timber which had been felled to create this large open space.

I made my way towards the cabin. The door was open. I called out to announce my presence, so as not to alarm the occupants, but my calls were answered by an eerie silence. I knocked on the door. There was no answer. A fine layer of dust covered the floor and the shelves. It appeared that no one had been inside the cabin for at least a week. As I surveyed the interior of the premises, it was obvious that some sort of struggle had taken place. A chair lay on its side, partly covered by a bright red and white check table cloth; eating utensils were strewn about the floor, and half-empty cans and packets of food lay on top of the old stove, what remained of the food therein had spilled over onto the floor. Other empty containers were piled up around the bottom of the stove.

Embedded in the smooth wooden doorway of the cabin, and in the polished wooden table were small hard pieces of bark and timber splinters.

My first thoughts were that the occupants had been attacked by some wild animal, and had possibly used a piece of wood from the fireplace as a weapon. Perhaps their wild swings had missed the attacker at times, and slammed into the table and door-jamb, which would explain the bark and timber splinters found in these areas. Yet the closer I looked for clues to shed some light on what had taken place, the less things seemed to make sense.

I found no trace of animal fur, nor any signs of blood. If the occupants of this cabin had escaped from their attacker, why was the spilled food left untouched? Surely the animal would have sampled at least some of it? These and other questions played on my mind. Why had the owners of the cabin not returned? Maybe they were injured, or just too scared to come back. I noticed a

large axe leaning in a corner of the room. Why hadn't they used that, rather than a piece of wood?

In my preoccupation with this mystery, I had lost all sense of time. It would be dark soon, and it was already too late to make my way back through the forest to the security of the base camp. Tonight I would have to stay in the cabin.

The night passed without incident, but I slept very lightly, my hearing acutely tuned to the medley of nocturnal noises.

The morning rays of sun were beginning to break through the fine mist, which hung low and completely obscured the tops of the tall trees. The grass was wet from the heavy dew. The air had a crisp coolness about it.

Emerging from the cabin, I stared out at the clearing, to the almost impenetrable green barrier beyond. The sounds of birds began to echo throughout the area, as the sun slowly climbed higher, following its chosen path across the blue horizon. I felt a calmness, a serenity almost, as I witnessed this peaceful scene; suddenly I had an impression of the oasis this clearing must have represented to the people who had lived here.

Having no desire to stay for another night, I decided to make a quick inspection of the area, in the hope of finding something which would help unravel the strange mystery that surrounded it.

As I walked around the perimeter of the clearing, signs that the forest was beginning to reclaim its ownership upon the land were apparent. Ferns and creepers were beginning to move in from the periphery of the thick forest, slowly but surely choking the life out of the lush grass. Tiny trees and bushes reached up from beneath the earth. They were only small now, but they would grow quickly. This was a man-made wound which the forest would soon heal.

But there was something unusual about the two trees behind the cabin.

In my twenty odd years as a woodcutter, I had built up a good knowledge of tree types and species; my livelihood depended upon it.

Yet the two trees in question bore no resemblance to any species I had ever seen before. Both seemed to belong to the same family, and they appeared to be the only ones

of this kind in the area. One stood about five and a half feet tall, the other about seven. The trunks of both trees were curved, twisted and bent in all directions. Strange ugly protrusions, bulbous, almost cancerous, covered the trunks and branches. The black, scaly bark which covered the trees was identical to the type I had found embedded in the table and the front door jambs of the cabin.

I grabbed the axe from inside the cabin. It was very sharp, and sliced deeply into the tree. Instantly, a dark reddish-black sap began oozing from the newly created wound. I hacked at the tree once more, and a neatly cut V-shaped piece of timber of about six inches in length fell to the ground. Some of the sap splashed onto my hands,

'The sounds of suffering, of agonising screams and yells, echoed throughout my mind'

arms and face; it was sticky and foul-smelling. I removed my shirt, and wiped the stuff from my skin as best I could, the rest could wait till I got home.

I took the freshly cut specimen of timber for later inspection, then hastily headed back through the thick forest towards my base camp, far away from this mysterious place.

March 8th. 1968.

It was late by the time I arrived home that night. After packing up the base camp and driving many hours, I felt totally exhausted. It was good to be home. I went straight to bed, and quickly fell into a deep sleep; my dreams were muddled and discomforting.

I slept in late the following day. On awakening, my joints felt stiff and sore. I put these symptoms down to all the walking I had done during the last couple of days, even though such exercise had never caused me problems before. After lunch, I took the sample of timber around to a friend of mine, who lived on the other side of town. We sat on his front verandah sipping on a couple of tins of cold beer. He slowly examined the small cutting, peering at it over the top of his

half-rimmed spectacles; staring at it closely, then holding it at a distance and rolling it around in his hands a couple of times before taking another sip of beer. He gathered up some of the remaining sap, rubbed it slowly between his fingers, then shook his head from side to side whilst displaying a puzzled expression. Finally, after a long silence, he admitted he'd never seen anything like it before, and could only conclude that it was probably some unknown mutation; a sort of freak of nature. I headed back home, leaving my friend deep in thought, and still pondering over the piece of wood.

It was late afternoon by the time I arrived at my house. I felt extremely tired and weary, even though I had done little all day. Maybe I had picked up some sort of flu virus that was going around. At any rate I had no desire for food. I was tired and all I wanted to do was go to bed.

March 9th. 1968.

I awoke in a state of fright more than once last night. The dreams! No, nightmares they were. The sounds of suffering, of agonised screams and yells, echoed throughout my mind. Yet I had no mental picture of the tormented souls from which they came.

I still felt no desire for food, but realised I would have to eat something to keep up my strength and fight off whatever unknown illness had befallen me. I began to suffer a constant aching within all my joints. After eating a light meal and having to force down every mouthful, I popped a couple of aspirin before returning to bed, and quickly falling asleep.

Colours, red and black, swirled together like a huge whirlpool. I found myself immersed within this liquid terror, desperately swimming with nowhere to go, only to be dragged closer and closer towards a nightmare spiralling funnel. A pitiful scream seemed to rise up from the liquid. I awoke in a lather of sweat. I was still screaming.

March 10th. 1968.

For the remainder of that night I drifted in and out of consciousness. Tossing, turning, sleeping and dreaming. Surprisingly enough, and considering my obvious lack of sleep, I didn't feel too bad. In fact I felt better than I had for the past

couple of days. My appetite had returned with a vengeance. I consumed a huge breakfast. As I ate, I noticed that my hands had lost some of their rigidity, and the joints were a little less painful. I also noticed that my skin had become much drier and darker in colour. Probably a reaction to the aspirin I took last night, I thought to myself.

As the day wore on, I found that my craving for food became more insatiable by the hour. I ate and ate without achieving any satisfaction.

By the end of the day, I had consumed most of the perishable foodstuffs in the house. My sense of exhaustion had returned, along with the painful joints and stiffness. My skin was becoming much drier and harder, and was beginning to split and crack between my fingers and toes, displaying the raw flesh beneath. I attributed my body's strange behaviour to some sort of allergic reaction. I remembered hearing about people who suffered problems after being bitten or stung by certain insects, or having rubbed against certain plants, their sap... The sap. Of course, that had to be it! I was experiencing some sort of reaction to the sap of those mysterious trees that I had found in the forest. Tomorrow I would drive into town and see the doctor, but for now, weariness had once again taken over my body. Slowly, stiff and sore, I made my way to the bedroom.

March 11th. 1968.

The terrifying nightmares continued unabated throughout the night. The same frightful visions repeated themselves over and over; colours of blood and dark earth, mixing and swirling in a writhing, heaving mass, before spewing out of every bodily orifice. Many times I awoke screaming. I sweated profusely, and the odour of my perspiration became so foul that on one occasion I began to vomit uncontrollably over the side of the bed.

In the morning, I managed with great effort to get out of bed. My joints had become so stiff I could hardly move. The pain was unbearable. Slowly I made my way to the bathroom, and stared into the large silver-framed mirror. On seeing my reflection, almost unrecognisable as human, I

immediately broke down and wept.

My skin was hard, and a dirty brown colour — almost black. Small lumps were beginning to obtrude and cover my whole body. My hair was being replaced by a fine leaf-like growth. Small, hard fleshy tentacles about three inches long protruded from the backs of my heels, and where my toenails once were, spiralling out in all directions.

Iwanted to scream, but my vocal chords had seized up; I was only able to emit a low, unrecognisable droning sound.

As I stared at the grotesque reflection in the mirror, I realised with horror that I was turning into something no longer human.

My story is coming to an end, as I fear I shall soon be also — my strength is fading.

Yesterday, the horrific changes to my body continued slowly to occur.

My skin, or should I say what used to be my skin, had now become thick, black and fibrous. My body, or the remnants of what used to resemble my human form, had begun to twist and contort into an ugly, deformed shape. The bulbous lumps protruded even further, and became more repellent

**'The same
frightful visions
repeated
themselves over
and over; colours
of blood and dark
earth'**

as time went on. The tentacles which had first begun to sprout from my feet had now begun to grow at the level of my knees. They also were becoming thick and fibrous. As the night went on, so the grisly metamorphosis continued.

This morning my need for sustenance had become obsessional. As my legs had become fused into one, I could only manage a crude waddling motion in my attempt to move from one room of the house to another. I began to create havoc in the kitchen, bumping into doors and cupboards, sending all sorts of pots and pans, dishes and cutlery crashing to the floor. I had already eaten most of the perishables, but I managed to consume only a small amount of what was left; the remainder fell to the floor and



mixed with the rest of the mess.

My mind began to drift, alternating between reality and a state of whirling red and black consciousness. I grabbed a sharp knife off the table and slashed deeply into what remained of my wrists. The fluid that flowed from the wound was not blood, but rather a thick, foul-smelling, dark red sap-like substance.

It is growing dark outside. My hunger pains no longer come from my stomach area, but from my lower half, around what is now a complex root system.

Soon I will be unable to continue writing this document, as I am finding it almost impossible to hold the pen in my deformed, stick-like fingers. I am going to attempt to get some help. I will try and get out the back way, across the yard. I must keep moving. If I stop, I fear I will begin to take root and feed from the earth. I will take this diary with me. I pray to God that I find help in time.

This is my last entry. If I fail in my search for help, then I beg of whoever reads my words within this book, please believe them. I swear to God they are true. Please, I beg you, destroy the strange growth under which you find this diary, so that I may end this living nightmare. And rest in peace.

The story of Harold James Loman is most bizarre, I'm sure you will agree. And if we are to believe that the events in this book are true, then the story becomes terrifying. Yet I remain unconvinced of its validity. I admit that the tree standing silently in my back yard is in every detail disgusting to behold, and enough to send any man's imagination running wild. Maybe the whole thing was just some sort of sick joke. In any case, I intend to remove that eyesore... Just as soon as I wipe this smelly, sticky sap from my face and hands.



PETER J BAKER is from Mayfield, New South Wales. He discovered FEAR while browsing in a bookshop in Sydney and his story, *The Diary of Harold James Loman*, is the first we have published by an Australian author. Let's have more FEARful fiction from our Antipodean fans!

FICTION FILE 5

STEPHEN LAWS



As his new novel blasts into bookshops, Stephen Laws, the Newcastle-based author of *Ghost Train*, *Spectre* and *The Wym*, puts the frighteners on FEAR's John Gilbert.

Gang warfare, robbery, corporate corruption, supernatural jiggy-pokery and a little bit of Armageddon feature in Stephen Laws' new novel. After the mechanical menace of *Ghost Train*, the creeping shadows of *Spectre* and the Lovecraftian ties of *The Wym*, *The Frighteners* is Stephen Laws' most blood-spattered book. It represents yet another swing in style, and it's a defiant one, partially aimed at those critics who still believe in the old genre definitions.

'Right now, the thing that disappoints me most about critics is that they want to know what camp you're in; whether you've got a quiet voice or a loud voice, whether you're in the Ramsey Campbell or the Charlie Grant tradition, or are an out and out Clive Barker or Shaun Hutson. That kind of pigeon-holing really restricts you.'

'A book's going to fall or stand on its own merits. It's really restricting for any kind of writer to have to write in one particular kind of voice. I speak in a quiet or loud voice as the story demands. As it happens, I'm speaking with a loud voice in *The Frighteners*, because it's an intense book. You'll probably find one of my upcoming projects will be a lot quieter.'

Laws has problems tracing the origins of *The Frighteners* because, for him, several disparate ideas click to make a story, but the title was another matter. 'I remember being really taken with the title. I was looking through the *Evening Chronicle* to see what was on television, and there was an episode of *Minder*, and it said something like, 'This week Arthur has the frighteners put on him'. I thought, what an interesting title, and the funny thing is that at least two other writers I've talked to over the past year were going to use that title for a work.'

'I decided that this time round I wanted to look at evil differently and say that it's all part and parcel of a man's soul, his psyche, his make-up. In the past it's tended to be an external force, but in the subtexts it's always a reflection of what's going on in characters' minds. I like this idea of man having the capacity to be a saint or a demon.'

Such individual battles between good and evil are important to Laws, who is a committed Christian. But the obvious question is: how can he combine his beliefs with life as a horror writer?

'I don't think I'm a holy Joe pie-in-the-sky kind of guy, but I've got a personal philosophy which isn't something that's acquired, it's something that you feel and it comes through in a way in the things that you write. The world can be a really cruel place, and inner fear is a prerequisite of life. You've got to have meaning, you've got to have hope in your life. Horror fiction concentrates that feeling.'

Laws' next major novel forms a unique experiment in horror fiction which he is unwilling to talk about just yet. He did say, however, that it involves police procedure in a way never before attempted in a supernatural thriller. That should keep you guessing until it appears, hopefully some time next year.



PLAYING FOR THE AUDIENCE

By Stratford A Kirby

I feel like shit, and the light's hurting my eyes. Worst of all, my .45's not in its holster. Who did this to me? Who put me down? Who made my body ache? Fuck it all, because I can't fucking remember.

But I can remember Inspector Wishbone. He's trailing me. That bastard's always breathing down my neck. It's time Wishbone stopped breathing altogether.

I prop myself up on my elbows and take a look around. My eyes have become accustomed to the glare of sodium street lights. Beyond these sheets of white incandescence, darkness. It's the Canker Quarter. At least, I think it's The Quarter. So difficult to get things straight. Could be there are bruises in my brain. Someone's going to pay for this. You can't do *this* to Sorrel Spritz! Others take the crap like it's sustenance. I can't and never could, because I've always known the eyes of the world are upon me.

When I was eight I beat a teacher with a cosh and my

classmates applauded. My life has been filmed. The cameras have always been there. The screening of the biography will confirm my status as a star. I won't let my audience down. I shout 'Fuck', and hear the mumbles of approval.

There's a juggler making a blur out of three dead cats over to my right. A whore without the benefit of legs is sucking off a punter in a well-lit alleyway. Shabby scumbags drift aimlessly, fear on their breath. I know The Quarter, but not as well as it knows me.

First I need a shooter. Not because of these dicks, but because of Wishbone. He doesn't see himself as just another member of the cast, he sees himself in the starring role.

I'm dusting myself off and getting my bearings. No money and no shooter. Still, that can be arranged. I walk past the pricks and the pimps, the dangerous and the drooling. They back off. I'm Spritz. You don't fuck with Spritz! I'm more solid than my surroundings. I'm more real than the crouching shanties with

missing walls. I'm more tangible than the tin tenements beaten into submission. I spit on the incestuous families who sit amidst the debris watching high definition television with low definition eyes.

A glance over my shoulder tells me that Wishbone's coming.

I duck into a warehouse and crouch behind the stinking, rusted bins. There's red light behind me and behind that, the impenetrable nothing of night. Shit! The law is for fools, cowards, those who crawl around the edges of true existence. I'm at the centre. I hate the law almost as much as Inspector Wishbone does.

Inspector Wishbone grabs the juggler. The cats thump to the ground.

'Sorrel Spritz, which way did he go, asshole? Come on, you fucker, I know he's around here!' Wishbone's voice is gruff, hard, ecstatic. 'Let me put it this way —' He nuts his would-be informant, whose nose breaks with a strangely amplified crack.

Blood and snot splash on face and floor. But not on Wishbone. The juggler points in my direction then cups his ruined nose with his skilful hands.

You bastard, Wishbone. You think it's your show, don't you. Well it's not. The first words I ever wrote were a script for fear and pain. I was the child who saw the fundamental beauty of the knife and heard the applause roll around the inside of my head like thunder. I was the child who provoked fear in others, a fear more permanent than respect could ever be.

'The face beneath the wide brim of his hat is shadow and scar tissue. Too ugly to be a star'

The lights are shining blue on the barrel of the Browning .38 in Wishbone's hand. The face beneath the wide brim of his hat is shadow and scar tissue. Too ugly to be a star. He comes to where I'm hiding. I can see you, Wishbone. You can't see me.

'Spritz, I know you're close, you sick bastard. I'm going to have you. And when I do, only the fucking gleam in your eyes will be resisting arrest. You're a dead man, Spritz. You ever been shot in the gut?' 

He's climbing over the rubble. His boots grind the bricks to dust. I push further into the crimson gloom. The low wall at my back isn't stable but I'm very careful. Wishbone will find me when I'm ready to be found. There's a film star smile on my face and I hear the titters of commendation.

'You're close, Spritz. I can smell your disease. I'm going to search every inch of The Quarter until I find you. I'll tear this fucking place apart!'

I watch him continue down the street. He questions a geriatric woman and leaves her bleeding on the ground. I need a shooter, *now!* Calmly, coolly, I stroll away in the opposite direction. I pass the quietly weeping juggler and the whore who's bringing her mouth to bear on yet another punter. So it goes on.

The gunsmith's resembles a massive birdcage. A lattice of light and dark is visible within. I pull the cord that rings the bell. Two stocky men peer through the mesh but I'm silhouetted by the glare behind me. The men make the mistake their kind constantly insist on making: they unbolt and open the door. They see my duracol suit, see my face. Recognition takes the slack out of their features. I breathe the wonderful, acrid stench of fear and suicidal excitement deep into my lungs.

'Berretta. Enfield. Luger. Mauser. Mossberg. Flobert. Snider. Krupp. Smith and Wesson. These, sweet boys, are a few of my favourite things.' I display my teeth in a most perfectly sinister leer. My audience is full of appreciation.

'Yes... err... yes, Mr Spritz. You couldn't have come to a better place. Now if you can... be a little more specific?'

His partner is surreptitiously reaching around to his waistband. I deliver a swift kick to the balls. He gasps and falls. His revolver clatters out of reach.

Time to be bad. You must always be in character.

I turn to the talker. 'To be specific, fuckface, I'm going over to that counter and if I see you so much as twitch, I'll cut your fucking guts out and stuff them down your stupid fucking throat!'

Now my audience is in raptures.

'Oh, I almost forgot.' The man nursing his swollen testicles is soon gagging in a pool of blood. His

teeth lie scattered as if by a shaman. Gore has dulled the shine on my shoe.

I amble over and ransack the cash register. Then I smash the glass display case, pick out and load a Smith and Wesson .45 automatic for my shoulder holster and a Krupp .32 revolver for my belt. I stuff handfuls of shells into my pockets. *Spritz, you are a dangerous man!*

On my way out, I remember it's all about fear. The greatest show on earth. Reputation is everything. That's why I suddenly pull the .45 and put a round in the talker's chest point blank. All sorts of shit blows out of his back as he tumbles across the shop. Dead before he hits the ground. Tumultuous applause. Reputation is everything. I leave the other one alive. When he finds his teeth, will he have a tale to tell!

Outside, I study the shooters lovingly. The circular discs buried in the butt of each pulse so prettily. All the shooters in the world belong to me.

Wait! Wishbone's coming. His breath is wheezing on the warm air. He's coming to the scene of the crime. But it's my crime. He's in second place. I do believe that's why he's so fond of his own crimes.

'The man nursing his swollen testicles is soon gagging in a pool of blood'

I run on my toes. The street curves until I'm behind the gunsmith's. I can still see the interior through the mesh. Wishbone's thundering entrance into the store is ruined when he slips in the blood. *I hear laughter.* The Inspector recovers and lifts the toothless survivor by the hair. He screams questions into his face but doesn't seem to be getting much sense out of him. Time for the slaps. Front hand. Back hand. Front hand. Back hand. *Can I hear applause?* When Wishbone has forced my name out of his terrified victim, he shoulders his way out.

I could wait for him now. Have it out once and for all. He thinks he's my nemesis, but he's only my shadow. I'm armed, Wishbone. You know I'm armed. Are you shitting yourself? No, I don't think you are. Too dumb to be scared? Or do you

believe you're invulnerable? If so, you're wrong. I'm the invulnerable one. The hero never dies. So there's no rush. I shall enjoy myself. I've been waiting for this such a very long time. How long? There are clouds in my brain that just won't blow away. Fuck it! Come on, Wishbone, catch as catch can.

I need a drink. The thirst comes and I can't remember it not being there. I cross to the perspex saloon. It's stuffy inside. Tarts and titheads turn towards me then quickly turn away. They know who I am, which in turn reaffirms to me who I am. Are they still filming? Or is the audience right here, crowded close to my consciousness, waiting for another supremely heroic gesture? The long wooden bar is graduated by beer taps. An assortment of crude and inconsequential bit players are propping it up.

'Gin, the good stuff. Not the piss you usually serve.'

'Certainly... certainly, Mr Spritz.' The barman's voice is unsteady. He's a victim waiting to be victimised. 'Here, Mr Spritz. This one's on the house.'

My audience is cooing gentle acknowledgement. The gin burns just as it should. I unfold a bill and order another. The clientele pretend to return to the trivial shit they were occupying themselves with before my arrival. Their movements are false, awkward. They make me puke. I look up, but the stars refuse to shine on the Canker Quarter.

'Spritz!'

The voice is loud. For a second I think it's Wishbone. No, it lacks the authority. Walking towards me are three well-dressed and confident men; three poxy amateurs.

'That's right,' I reply.

'We've been waiting to see you.'

'So you've fucking seen me, now fuck off!'

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Sorrel Spritz. Hero of the weak, persecutor of the weak. Those in the saloon press themselves against the walls. They try to become invisible. But watching, always watching. The whole world's watching me!

The three men have come to a halt in a half circle a few paces from me.

'You shouldn't talk like that, Spritz. It's likely to make us unhappy.'

'Well if that makes you unhappy, this is really going to piss you off —'

My right hand that had been casually hooked in my belt is now holding, aiming and firing the .32. All three lunge for their shoulder holsters. Noise. Smoke. I hit one of them in the head. His brains escape so quickly you'd think that freedom had always been their ambition. Metal wasps buzz by me. I put two bullets into another's chest. He flips over a table and lands sitting upright in a chair. The last one of them is retreating, still firing. If he had a starring role I would be dead, but he hasn't. I'm crouching. I've ripped out the .45. A bullet hits the bar beside my face. Splinters carve an arc in the air. I'm plugging the bastard. He starts to dance and jerk. I'm pulling his strings. Puppet master. Then I cut his strings and he falls to his knees. I've thumped holes in his lungs and he's drowning. It's all over in moments. I'm deafened by the applause!

The harts are shrieking — in a state of lust. The titheads are whimpering — overcome with adoration. The extras want class, I've always understood. So I give them class.

'Another gin, barman. Move your fucking self.'

Yes, he's here. I see him through the perspex wall, careering along the litter-strewn pavement. Inspector Wishbone. I vault over the bar.

'The back way out! Now, you bastard!'

The barman points. Glancing over my shoulder, I see Wishbone smashing the lung-shot man to the sawdust. Always too fast for you, Wishbone. I lead, you follow. Commit your own crime, you cowardly shit!

The glorious chase is on and the air is hot in my throat. I'm pelting around familiar streets. Wishbone's heavy footsteps are echoing in my ears. I barge spectators out of my way. A dog yaps at my heels but turns tail when I bark back. I trip the base of a human pyramid and send them crashing out into the darkness. Tired now, I secrete myself down the third alley after the gunsmith's. Within seconds I've reloaded both shooters. And within seconds Wishbone arrives, panting, cursing and continuing right on past. I could drop him. Why don't

I? It's strange, but maybe I'd miss the Inspector. Oh, I'll kill him eventually. It's all part of the show. But not yet. Who'll take his place? Who has the qualifications?

I notice a sharp pain in my cheek. Blood is coursing over my collar. It's a splinter. A big fucker that I can feel the tip of on the inside with my tongue. I grab the wooden shard and slowly pull it out of my face. Come on. I want a standing ovation. Do I flinch? Like hell I do. The meat around the wound is tearing. I think into the pain and concentrate. I remember a quote from that script I wrote when I was a boy. Pain is only a problem if you're too weak to enjoy it. The splinter's out and I'm pinching the ragged hole to stem the flow of blood. The applause is louder than ever.

'Didn't that hurt?' I turn and see a woman. She is, without doubt, a whore and looks like she's had a very long day. She also asks stupid questions.

'Of course it fucking hurt!'

Now she's frightened. This fear makes her wetter than a thousand punters ever could.

'I can make the pain go away,' she says, walking forwards.

'No, you can only add to it.'

What dialogue! It's taken years of practise to perfect such sinister overtones.

The whore's skirt stops at the thighs. Her T-shirt is nipple-tight. Her face is just another replica of what's gone before and what's to come.

'I'm not free... but I'm cheap.' Her fingers are wiping the blood from my cheek.

Obviously I have to be especially wicked. The main protagonist must be consistent.

'You're not cheap... you're free.'

I push her against the wall. The wall shudders. The whore shudders. She begs me not to do it but she knows that I have to. Surely she can hear the clamorous applause. I rip away her flimsy T-shirt. I think it's been a long time for me. I'm holding her throat and opening her legs with my knee. She's wearing nothing beneath her skirt. The lights are getting brighter. I'm unzipping...

The floor is made of wood and I've hit it hard.

'Move and I'll blow your fucking balls off, you fucking animal!'

I'm gazing up at the blotchy, blazing face of Inspector Wishbone.

The butt of the .38 he's pointing at me is bloody from where he cracked it over my skull. The disc in the butt is blinking steadily. I'm nauseous but not at all worried. This is Spritz. I'm invulnerable, uncatchable, unkillable.

'Why don't you shoot, Wishbone? Have the guts for once in your miserable life to commit your own crime.'

This is fantastic. I've got the film star smile. I've got more fans than the Pope.

'Just open your jacket, nice and slow, and ease the shooter out. You've got to face the facts, Spritz,

'The last one of them is retreating, still firing. If he had a starring role I would be dead, but he hasn't'

this isn't your show any more.'

I'm lowering the .45 by my fingertips and contemplating crimes. The world consists of those who want to commit crimes, those who commit them, and the brilliant who stage-manage them. Wishbone's thinking about crime. A double crime to even the score. His eyes flick to the whore. Hot glance on a hotter cunt. The .32's out of my belt. Wishbone's quick. We fire simultaneously. I hear two bleeps and clicks in unison. The disc is shining in my palm. We bleep-click again and then I'm not considering the coincidence of both guns jamming, I'm leaping up to meet Wishbone's bull-like charge. It's like fighting a mirror. He's kicking at me. He's grabbing fists of hair. I'm gouging at an eye. I'm biting through his wrist to the bone. We're tumbling out of the alley into light as bright as a summer sun with only night above.

We break apart. The applause swamps his acid curses. Applause for me! Applause goading me to commit murder. I'm going to kick his brains out. I know my role. Meanest bastard in The Quarter. Thief, betrayer, rapist, killer, hero. The punch catches me low but I bring my head up sharply and feel his jaw crunch. I don't care how many ribs his fists are breaking. I don't care that his teeth have pierced my lips. I don't care because I don't fear fear, and so I

fear nothing. And we're on our knees. We're still punching. Wishbone's face is splitting, swelling, bruising. If he falters, he's dead. He has to falter, because I never will.

He's falling away. There's a dart sticking out of his neck. He's clawing at it. I'm on my back. The dart's in my gut. My body's numb. The star can't move a muscle. The applause enters me and jiggles my innards. My head's on one side, pointing out to the darkness beyond. A red curtain descends. Am I dying? No fucking way, but the curtain's all I can see. No, I won't have it! I'm unkillable and the curtain's slowly lifting. No more darkness. I see hundreds, thousands of people, all standing in their seats and frantically applauding. They're cheering. They're whistling. What is this shit? That's it, I've blacked out. I must be unconscious now. The curtain descends, then ascends again. Still the cheering and clapping. Clap me in my dreams, you bastards. Five times the curtain does its trick. On the sixth it stays down.

White-suited goons are swabbing my wounds. They're punching needles into my arm. I won't be fooled. My unconscious mind has materialised the ultimate audience. It's let me see my audience, the audience that has always been there. I'll get my body back soon and, when I do, Wishbone's fat arse is mine.

Attendants wearing marshall jackets are dragging bodies away. I'm being wheeled out of The Quarter on a trolley. The wheels of the trolley don't make a sound in the carpeted corridor. Some of the numbness is gone. I can move my mouth. I can make sounds. I can speak.

'What is all this bollocks? Are these straps?'

The man shunting me along glares down into my face.

'Jesus, when are you going to learn some new lines? I'm not supposed to talk to you.'

'You'll talk if I want you to talk, fucker! I won't be strapped in my dreams.'

'You make me sick, Spritz. This is no dream, get it? You haven't passed out, you're too stupid to know when to lie still.'

'And you're full of crap! I was in The Quarter, with Wishbone on my tail. I blew four shitheads away.'

'You really are incredible, Spritz. You were on a *stage*! When the audience buy their tickets, they enter the lottery. The lucky winners get a chance to feel what it's like to live in the Canker Quarter. You and Wishbone are there so the dangers are real enough. One of them might even become a star overnight and put you under for good.'

Why am I arguing? Did Wishbone knock my brain out of line? I'm not frightened. I never have been. But this dream bastard hates me. If I wasn't strapped down...

'The shooters are real, and if mine hadn't jammed I'd have —'

'Oh, the guns are real, right enough. The audience wouldn't have it any other way. Real apart from the trigger override that stops you or Wishbone from ever dropping the other.'

'Inspector Wishbone, dickshit. This proves it's all crazy because he's a Station man.'

'Was a Station man! Inspector Wishbone got twenty-five years for his last excess.'

I'm being steered into the back of a van. Or at least I'm not, because it's a dream van and I've got to keep playing for the audience. The orderly whacks me up with something that runs through my head like hot treacle.

'Fuck, it's all fuck! I've never been caught. I never will be caught.'

As the van doors lock, I hear him shout. 'Life imprisonment plus three shows a week. Take it from me, you won't last the shows!'



I feel like shit, and the light's hurting my eyes. Worst of all, my .45's not in its holster. Who did this to me? Who put me down? Who made my body ache? Fuck it all, because I can't fucking remember. But I can remember Inspector Wishbone.

STRATFORD A KIRBY was born in Hunstanton in 1964 and has lived in Gibraltar, France, Greece and (presently) Bradford. His literary successes include a series of plays for BBC Radio and a short story published in *The Gate*. He is currently spending a fortune on postage and completing his second novel.

character role by tony j forder



Carl looked up sharply from the keyboard. He thought he'd heard a noise somewhere in the house. He listened intently, hearing only the familiar sound of his word-processor humming softly, the gentle knocking from the central heating system, and the refrigerator kicking in and out. He waited, but there was nothing else. Nothing untoward. Carl shook his head and returned to his work.

He loved his job. He could think of no better way of spending the early morning hours than sitting at his desk, writing. Though he was midway through his eleventh novel, and had penned — or processed — more than a hundred short stories, Carl still got a buzz from writing. His two-finger style hadn't become noticeably more fluent, but the words flowed just the same. The money, fame, fine house, large car and a secure future were great, but he knew he'd still be sitting somewhere, cranking out the words in long-hand if necessary, no matter what his financial circumstance. He



hadn't started out rich, and the PCW had originally been on credit terms, but he simply loved to write. Fortune had smiled upon him, and he knew he was one of the lucky ones.

Carl's works were all on the same theme of horror and/or fantasy. Baseness and carnage. His tomes were not particularly impressive works of literature, but they told the tale effectively, were imaginative and suspenseful. Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch and Rod Serling had done the spade work, but Stephen King had paved the way for the genre. Because of him, horror writers were no longer frowned upon to the degree they once had been, they were not loftily dismissed at publishing house parties. They were big business, and Carl was right up there with the best of them.

He started, depressing a wrong key as his arm jerked. Carl frowned curiously. There was another sound; an anomaly against the familiar. He couldn't quite nail it down, but whatever it was it bothered him, and he could not give his work the attention it

deserved until the mystery was solved. As he moved away from the desk and crossed over to the study door, Carl smiled ironically. What a cliché: a man, all alone in a rambling Victorian house miles from anywhere, suddenly hears an unfamiliar sound. As he moved from the room into the passage he thought back to his own list of stories, wondering whether he'd written anything as basic. Probably, he decided, though much of his own work was lost to the mists of time.

Carl stood on the landing, ears straining to catch the new noise. *The silence is so loud*, he noticed, and immediately recognised another hackneyed phrase. *God, is there anything fresh? No matter how we dress them up, there are only so many tales to tell, only so many ways to tell them. All just a variation on a theme.* Carl looked up quickly. Something had moved upstairs, in the large attic room he'd set aside for junk. *Christ, this is getting worse. Bad enough living through the old empty house chestnut, but a movement coming from the attic? That really was too much.* Carl grinned. He wasn't at all frightened — not even nervous. Merely curious.

He mounted the steps and pushed open the attic door, half expecting the hinges to groan theatrically. They didn't, offering only a halfhearted squeal. Carl felt for the light switch and flipped it down. The naked bulb worked, but the glow was dim, leaving the room murky and swathed in shadows. He glanced around, squinting for a clearer view. Old furniture stood like cast-off husks; chairs, tables, wardrobes, dressers. Old paintings wrapped in yellowed newspaper lined the base of one wall. There were cardboard boxes, tea-chests, black polythene bags, suitcases, tins of paint, rolls of wallpaper, aluminium steps, scraps of wood and plasterboard, a hideous lampstand — an unwanted gift — some old albums and 45s, and thick layers of heavy dust.

Jesus, Carl thought in wonder. *How on earth have I managed to accrue all this?* He picked his way around a stack of boxes marked 'paperbacks'. He smiled affectionately when his eyes came to rest upon an old acoustic guitar propped up against a chest of drawers. Carl ambled across to it

and strummed the metal strings with the nail of his forefinger. He winced. The sound was tuneless and awful. He took a deep breath, coughing as the mustiness slipped into his lungs. *Nothing up here. No rats, no mice. A trapped bird?* he wondered briefly, then shrugged the notion aside. A bird would be flapping furiously for release. No, must be the plumbing, or someth...

'Hello, Carl.' Carl whirled round, stumbling back against a narrow wardrobe, dislodging several layers of dust which sprinkled over his

"Who the hell are you?" Carl demanded angrily, taking one step closer to the intruder'

sweater and made him cough once more. He peered through the fine haze and saw a figure perched on top of a tea-chest over on the far side of the attic.

'Who the hell are you?' Carl demanded angrily, taking one step closer to the intruder. 'What do you think you're doing here?'

A long black gash opened up across the man's face. He was grinning. 'You know me, Carl,' came the answer. 'Robert Chambers. Remember?'

Carl took another step closer. He could see the man more clearly now that the dust had settled. Average height, average build, close-cropped, grey hair, startlingly blue eyes. He looks a little like Paul Newman, thought Carl. The name the man had given sounded familiar, as was the face.

'Even if I do know you,' Carl said forcefully, 'and I'm not at all certain about that, what are you doing up here in my attic?'

'Tell him, Arnie,' said the man, looking over to his left.

Another figure stood against the emulsified wall. Carl opened his mouth in astonishment. The man was naked from the waist up, thick scars running across his chest, heavier ones wrapping around his neck like a collar. Carl closed his mouth, struggling for the right words. But he could only repeat himself. 'Who are you? What do you want?'

Now he was nervous. Now he was frightened.

'Arnie Baker,' the man said, his



voice dry and harsh. 'Surely you remember me?'

And suddenly, Carl did remember. He remembered Robert Chambers, too. Carl recalled tapping out the words that had described Chambers as closely resembling Paul Newman. He also recalled the words he'd written telling how Arnie Baker had lost his head to a bedevilled Samurai sword, and how his heart had been torn away by a psychotic antique dealer. They were characters from his stories. They were his creations, not flesh and blood. Yet here they were.

Carl massaged his brow with the soft pads of his fingers. This couldn't be happening. No way. Fiction was just that. This... this was a nervous breakdown, or something similar.

'I don't like what you did to me, Carl,' Arnie said, his eyes cold, tinged with sadness. 'It wasn't nice. Not very nice at all.'

Carl shook his head furiously. 'Not me. I didn't do anything. It...'

'You wrote it, Carl. It couldn't've happened without you.'

'But I...' Carl's shoulders slumped. 'I just wrote a story. That's all.'

Robert eased himself from the tea-chest, landing on the attic floor with a soft thud. 'You didn't care about us, though,' he said bitterly. 'You don't seem to care who you hurt, Carl.'

The writer uttered a short, humourless laugh. 'But you were just characters. Some characters live, some don't. That's the way it is. It's just... stories.' He racked his brains, trying to remember how he had disposed of Chambers. 'Bobby' Chambers from his short story, *The Slowest Gun In The West*. Sold to Pan Books for a couple of hundred. Ah, he had it now. Bobby had been poisoned. Not a pretty way to go.

'Stories!' a contemptuous voice spat from the gloom and shadow of the far end of the attic. A tall, lumbering man stepped forward, taking slow, long and menacing strides. He fixed Carl with a penetrating stare.

'Stories, did you say? Well not to us, Carl. Not to us.' Carl saw the man's features clearly. Once again he was at a loss as to who it could be.

'What are only stories to you,' the man said as he stopped some feet away, 'are lifeblood to us. You owe your fortune to us. We only owe our

deaths to you. Hardly a fair exchange, I think you'll agree.'

But Carl didn't. 'No. No, that's too simple. I created you. All of you. You came from my mind. Without me you would not have lived at all.' *What are you saying here, you dumb jerk? They can't be alive. You know that. They don't exist. They are words on a disc not flesh on bone.*

'Then you discarded us,' Arnie said, and for the first time, Carl noticed that the man's head was resting on the neck at a most unnatural and alarming angle.

'As he shook his head in disgust the stitching on his neck popped, and thick dark blood seeped slowly from the wound'

'Yeah,' Bobby agreed. 'You threw us away like an old Kleenex.'

'Like I said, Carl,' the unidentified figure nodded, 'not very nice at all.'

Carl raised his hands in surrender. He sensed their hostility, feared their intentions. 'Now just hold on a moment. Let me get a grip on this. I sat down and plucked your names, your features and your characteristics from thin air. Then at some point I wrote you out again. Now you're here, not words on a computer disc, but seemingly physical entities.' He shook his head slowly. 'Sorry boys, I don't buy it. I'm either dreaming, hallucinating, having a breakdown, or someone put you up to this to scare me. But I really don't think any of you are real.'

'What about me, then?' asked a young girl who had appeared from nowhere.

Carl recognised her as a ghost who had played a leading role in a story entitled, *Haunting The Streets*. 'And me,' came another voice, and another, and suddenly the whole attic was full of Carl's creations.

He backed away, though the door leading back to the landing was barred by a grotesquely deformed dwarf who'd met an ignoble end halfway through the author's third novel.

'What do you want of me?' Carl roared, convinced now of the

reality of his situation. He was confused, scared, and surprisingly angry. 'You want me to write you back in, is that it? I can do that. I can recreate you all. How about that, huh?' Carl looked from face to face, blinking anxiously.

Bobby Chambers shook his head. 'You don't understand, do you?' he sneered, a scathing accusation. 'We've come to see you die. Just like we had to.' There was a muttered rumble of agreement.

Carl wet his bottom lip. His tongue felt like sandpaper. 'You... you're going to... to kill me?' He hated saying the word. It was one thing to write it, over and over again. But to say it out loud was another. 'You can't. I mean...'

'You still don't understand,' Arnie said. As he shook his head in disgust the stitching on his neck popped, and thick dark blood seeped slowly from the wound. 'We're not going to kill you. Bobby said you were going to die just like us, and that's how it's going to be. You see, Carl, you're only a figment of some other writer's imagination. You only exist because someone else wrote your name. And now they're going to write you away, just like you did us.'

Carl knew that he was going crazy now. He was real. He knew that, he clung desperately to that belief.

'We all felt as real as you do,' the dwarf said, his face a curious mixture of compassion and hatred, 'but we all fell to the flourish of a pen, or the rattle of a few tiny keys. That's the way it is, Carl.'

And Carl knew it was true. Try as he might, he could not recall having had a past. No childhood, no parents, relatives or friends. He could only think back as far as hearing the noise from the study. All he knew was the house, the PCW downstairs and the attic.

He had no past, because his life had only begun with the first word of this story.

And, with the last, his life ends.



TONY J FORDER is thirty-two years old and lives near Peterborough. He has had various jobs, none of which fulfil him as much as writing. Last year he won a horror story competition, and Pan are publishing his winning entry in this year's edition of their anthology of horror stories.



THE FIFTH HORSEMAN

John Pritchard

*There came a secret thief — they
call him Death —*

*Who slayeth all the people in this
land.*

*And with his spear he split his
heart in two,*

*And went his way without another
word...*

**Geoffrey Chaucer: The
Pardoner's Tale**

He carried his saddle and kit slung over his back. Even with head bowed and shoulders hunched against the weight, he was still a tall man, lean, made to seem broader by the wind-ruffled cloak he wore. The garment was black and spattered with mud; his boots were encrusted with it, and sank into the mire with each step. His horse followed in his wake, plodding wearily — as if shamed that its master should have to carry its burden. And still the man kept striding forth, tugging the

animal's reins, labouring on beneath an overcast sky.

The long-dried watercourse had become a river of mud, shallow and gleaming in the wan sunlight; but it scarcely impeded their progress. The man was tired, his horse lame, but he kept hauling his shambling mount onwards towards the wide, stormy horizon.

The countryside around was dark with shale, and growing darker as evening fell. The man cut away from the riverbed, trudging upslope with his reluctant horse in tow, until they came to the crest of the bluff and saw the village below. The horse tugged halfheartedly at its rein, searching for grass. But there was no grass in that place. Nor was there any to be seen in the whole of the decomposed landscape spread before them. It was as if the black plague which had swept over the land had stripped it of all its greenery. Trees were left wilting and rotting; ploughland reduced to a muddy pulp. Here beleaguered humanity hung on in isolated settlements, such as the one lying before them now. The traveller

stood watching for a little while, his figure outlined against the low, heavy sky. The wind tugged at his cloak, and ruffled his fair hair — for he was bareheaded. The village, he saw, was a cluster of wooden hovels, part sunk into a main street which resembled a sea of mud, and was dominated by a stone-walled chapel. The shambles was punctuated here and there by the glow and flicker of lamps — evidence that this place had not yet been entirely abandoned to its ghosts.

The traveller adjusted the load on his back, jerked the rein of his horse and started down towards the settlement.

Something told him his search was almost ended.



The village lay waiting in the twilight, its derelict buildings silent. Doorways gaped open, shutters hung loose. The wooden Calvary in midstreet leaned drunkenly to one side.

Only the lad from the inn was there to witness the arrival of the stranger. He was out in the cold dusk, whistling for his dog, when he heard the squishing of boots and hooves in the mud and, turning, saw the sombre figure approaching down the street, leading his horse. The man wore spurs and a silver-mounted sword,

**"For a worse
horror is abroad
in the land — and
his coming
presages the end
of all things"**

and they chinked softly as he walked; the horse tossed its head once, snorting. But other than that they proceeded in silence along the middle of the street, heedless of the ankle-deep slush, moving at a slow but relentless pace.

The boy shrank back into the alley between two houses, cowering in the shadows, while the other went by. But then curiosity got the better of him, and he stepped forward again to peer round the corner as the stranger passed by. The boy watched as the man turned towards the inn.

It was the brightest-lit of the miserable shanties, and in the

light from its doorway the boy thought he glimpsed the traveller's frozen breath trail like a wraith behind him — the breath of a warm and living man, not of a phantom, an itinerant corpse. Growing in confidence now, the boy started along the duckboard track beside the road. If the traveller was aware of his approach, he gave no sign, but simply proceeded to tie his mount's rein to the signpole before stepping inside.

The interior of the place was cramped, smelly and deserted, save for the innkeeper himself who stood behind the crude plank bar. On hearing the creak of boots on the floorboards, he looked up sharply. His reaction to the newcomer was as full of fear as the boy's had been — more so, if anything, because the stranger was staring straight at him. But if the man's dirty-blond hair and strong features gave him a handsome aspect, there was nothing at all pleasing about the pale blue eyes, cold as a winter's sky, with which he now surveyed the room.

The traveller's clothes had about them the scruffiness of many days on the road; his boots were yellow with mud. In addition to the heavy cloak, he wore woollen gloves, split and fraying at the fingers, and a muffler wound around his neck. After appraising this newcomer, the innkeeper relaxed only slightly, for if this was not a supernatural visitation, then a wandering vagabond in this wild country could bring death equally swiftly.

The man unslung his burden, dumping it on the nearest table. The innkeeper was used to customers who carried their worldly goods on their backs. He watched as the other drew up a stool. The boy entered the room, giving the traveller a wide berth as he went to stand at his father's side. And then the stranger pointed with one shabby-gloved hand towards the flagons of wine behind the bar, and at last the tension was broken.

They hurried to serve him. The boy poured a cup of the wine and brought it over with a crust of bread. The innkeeper asked if the good sir would like something to eat. Seated now, and pulling off his gloves, the traveller nodded. The innkeeper disappeared into a back room thick with the stench of cooking, and soon returned with a

bowl full of meaty stew. The traveller began to eat; still he had not spoken a word.

Despite the aura of foreboding which hung about the man, the innkeeper hovered ingratiatingly: he saw that it was up to him to open communications.

'If it's sanctuary you're seeking, then you have chosen the right place, my lord. The Pestilence and then the marauders from the hills have destroyed this whole village: only phantoms will trouble you here.'

The traveller continued to wolf his food. The host gave him a quick glance, then cleared his throat. 'I pray you, make your peace with God, sir. For a worse horror is abroad in the land — and his coming presages the end of all things.'

The chewing stopped. There was a pause. Then the traveller slowly raised his head. The innkeeper flinched from that cold, enquiring gaze, but he pressed doggedly on.

'The end is coming, sir: we know that. Two days ago, Death himself rode through our village, and all who crossed his path were struck down...'

The gathering fell silent once more; then the boy spoke up. 'He has come to seek out those who

**"You cannot kill
what does not
live, lord.
Everyone knows
that"**

have escaped this foul plague, lord: to slay, and slay, and slay again — until no one is left alive. Last time we were spared... but he will be back.'

The stranger had resumed his meal; but his gaze returned to the boy, and invited him to continue.

'I told the same to others here before you, lord,' the youngster said. 'The Slayer was here: he walked into this house and cut down a man who was drinking alone. We were in the back room: we heard him die. Then the Slayer rode on...' The boy and his father were both very pale now. Still chewing quietly, the traveller looked from one to the other. The innkeeper was beginning to wonder whether he was capable of speech at all.

The boy continued. 'When I told them this, the men were angry,

and rode off in pursuit of Death. But he will trap and slay them like all the rest. For you cannot kill what does not live, lord. Everyone knows that.'

The innkeeper rubbed his hands together in their worn mittens. 'It is even as we have been told, sir. Death shall become incarnate upon Earth, and all evil with him, so it is written. In the Last Days...'

The traveller gestured for his cup to be refilled, and though he remained silent, it was clear that he was interested. The host was about to tell him of the nearby village, and what had happened there, when a single agonised cry rang out in the dusk.

After the scream, the sound of hoofbeats. 'He's come back for us!' the lad blurted out. But the two men, listening hard, made out the sounds of three horses, not one. Three riders entering the village from the east. The innkeeper did not seem to be consoled.

'Outlaws, sir, from the hill country. Guard yourself, for they are godless men.'

And with that, father and son retreated behind the bar and stood braced to withstand the coming storm, as they had done many times before. The traveller remained where he was, staring thoughtfully down at the cup in his hand. All three waited, as the approaching hoofbeats mingled with the creaking of saddle leather and the clink of slung weapons, until they heard the riders rein in and dismount outside. There was a moment's stillness; then the doors flew open. The traveller gave the newcomers a sidelong look.

There were indeed three of them, roughly but warmly dressed, and heavily armed. But what immediately seized the attention — and tightened the stomach — were the crude, face-covering masks they wore, masks of red-dyed cloth, the eyeholes of which did not quite match...

They ignored the traveller at first, two of them striding past him to the bar. But the third closed the doors firmly behind him and took up position, his surcoat parted just enough to clear the handle of the meat-knife in his belt.

The traveller dipped his bread into the dregs of his stew, and listened with half an ear as the marauders demanded food, wine, and supplies for their horses. An earthenware pot was smashed

open, gold and silver pennies rattling on the bartop. Then he sensed their attention turn towards him.

One of the robbers stepped up close behind him: he was rubbing a dagger sensuously against the ball of his thumb.

'I'll wager you have come far, pilgrim: what have you to contribute?'

The one near the doorway was also moving in, drawing his own blade to prod experimentally at the stranger's saddle and other possessions. 'Fine leatherwork,' he pointed out to his companion. 'And a sheepskin lining — it should fetch a goodly sum...'

The traveller glanced from one to the other; and though his expression did not change, there was a look in his eyes that abruptly stilled their chuckles, a disdain that might have been provoked by the challenge of some puny and inferior insect, and an ageless mockery...

He drew his sword too fast to follow, converting the movement into a backhand swipe that took the man behind him in the throat. Then the sword thrust straight forwards to pierce the chest of the one in front. The third outlaw lunged out, his own sword leaping into view, but the traveller, still seated, deflected his stroke with an agile flick of his wrist, and ran him through.

The last man died before the first had hit the floor.

The traveller wiped his blade on the muffler of the nearest corpse: the bloody-edged iron was made gleaming new. He slid it back into its sheath, and downed the last of his wine before getting to his feet.

How much? his gesture asked.

The innkeeper was nonplussed for a moment, then he shrank away. 'No charge, good sir, no...' He recovered himself. 'I will make ready your room...'

The traveller smiled thinly and shook his head. He was already pulling on his gloves. Father and son continued to gape at him.

'But you cannot ride out after dark,' the innkeeper protested. 'What we told you is true: Death is out there — waiting.' He stepped quickly around the bar and over to the man in black, almost stumbling over a fallen body. 'A few miles from here... a village like this one... Death rode in and slew

everyone, from babes to old folk. And now he has made his dwelling in that cemetery. Can you not see, sir? Not even your sword can slay this enemy.'

The traveller responded by shouldering his burden and making for the door. The innkeeper followed him and watched as he saddled his waiting mount. And the boy, peering past his father in the doorway, was surprised to see that the horse, which had been trailing spent and limping in its master's wake, was now sound and refreshed once more. The man swung astride, nodded once to his hosts, and rode off into the dying light without a backward glance.

Father and son retreated into the inn, and bolted the doors against the night.



Out in the countryside, the gloom was stifling. But gradually the wind blew the cloud ceiling to tatters, and a frosty sky full of stars opened out above him. By their light, the traveller followed the road towards the village of the dead.

By the time the rotting outlines of the buildings loomed into sight, the night had come to seem unnaturally cold — colder even than frost could make it. The man reined in his horse well short of the settlement, dismounted, and tethered the animal to a fence post. His eyes never leaving the village, he slowly drew his sword.

The place was silent. A ghost-village. An open grave.

Here, at the intersection of dirt roads, the shanties were clustered together like heaps of firewood, rough and haphazard. Only the Norman church stood out, commanding this crossroads, and it seemed that the rest of the settlement huddled around it for protection. The wild sighing of the wind as it blew up the valley pressed home this idea. And as the traveller waited and watched, that wind came gusting through the village towards him, flowing almost unchecked through the empty buildings: creaking shutters, banging doors, hissing through gaps in the planking, sweeping up grit and dead leaves which it whirled into his face.

The air quietened, and the traveller walked on into the village. All around him now the

silent dead were lying: strewn in the mud, huddled or sprawled, cut down in their tracks and left where they had fallen. For something far more fatal than pestilence had been this way before him: something bringing death to all it touched — guided by eyes that saw in the dark, and controlled by a mind of inhuman cunning.

He began to pick his way between the bodies and as he did so he peered through windows, into doorways and around corners, stepping over corpses, or rolling them aside. Returning to the street he backed and circled to cover every direction with his cold-eyed gaze and levelled blade. But in this

'The last man died before the first had hit the floor'

broken maze of starlight and shadow, the silence was absolute, save for the guttering wind; as he moved through the village, only the dead were there to see.

At length he came to the tavern, a grim caricature of the first inn, for here no lamps burned, and only corpses had their lodging. Yet for all that, someone was sitting at meat in the inner room.

Someone, or some thing.

It looked round slowly as the traveller entered; and its aspect, though outwardly human, would have sent a chill through any normal man. The figure was draped in a cloak of dark, heavy fur. A muffler framed its face like a monk's hood, and it wore an iron helmet over that; a few hanks of blond hair escaped from beneath the rim. The face was gaunt, pale, frighteningly immobile, the eyes sunk deep into their bony sockets. The traveller looked into those eyes, deep into the blackness beyond.

'Welcome to you, Brother,' the apparition said. 'You will break bread with me? Theirs is miserable fare... but there is a little over.'

The traveller sheathed his sword and approached in silence, pulled up a chair and sat down. They faced each other there in the darkness — yet each could see the other with an eerie clarity.

'Are not these mortals easy prey?' the helmeted one continued. 'I have slain them in their hundreds, and picked them off at my leisure.'



It is grand sport.'

Still the traveller did not speak; but his eyes locked with the other's and communicated on a more fundamental level still. They said clearly that the time had come for this to stop.

The Horseman of Death laughed harshly. 'Finish? I have barely begun, Brother, and this nation is ripe for the harvesting.'

But still the traveller held his gaze. With those pale eyes bearing his message, he had no need of words.

Now Death rose, angrily. 'What do you mean, not yet time? Can you not see that all around us their world is collapsing?' He rested his palms on the tabletop, and leaned forward. 'Now our day has come, Brother of mine — and I intend to make the most of it.'

The traveller stared at him, unblinking, until the Reaper was forced to drop his gaze. *You have been too eager, Brother, the eyes told him. You rode out too early. The days of men are numbered, but the time is not yet right. We must be patient until that final day, my Brother. Come, then, and ride back with me: for we must return to our own world now.*

There was a pause. Then Death showed his teeth in a bitter smile. 'So humanity has not yet reached the end of its road?'

Now the stranger smiled also. *Not yet, the cold eyes said. Not yet...*



In that ravaged countryside, there was no one to see the two dark shapes galloping northward in the windy starlight, riding back to join their comrades; the roaming Slaughterer — and the soulless silence of Desolation.

The Horseman of Death was returning to his lair.

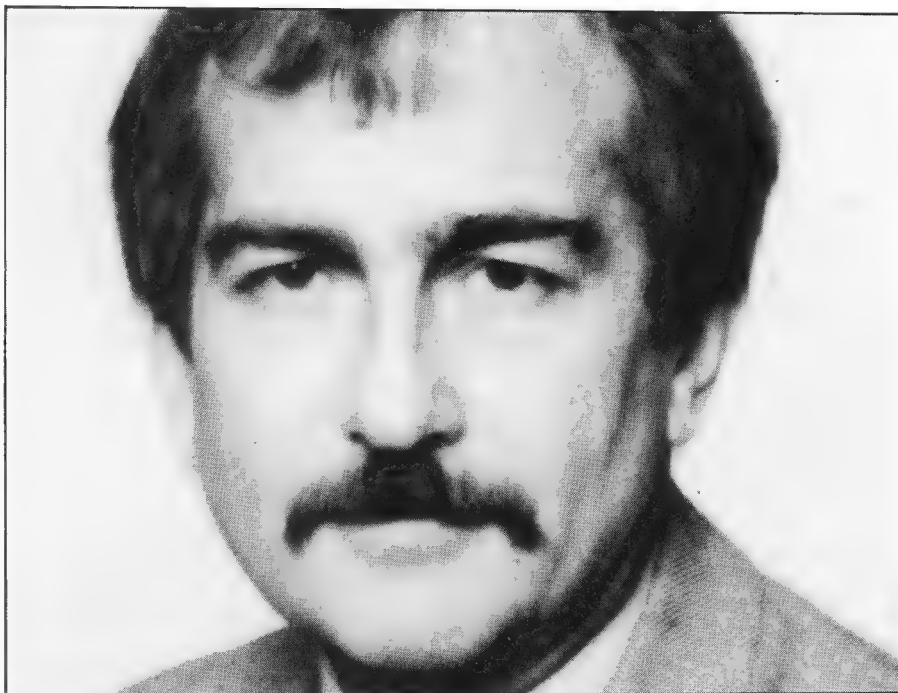
And Hell followed with him.



JOHN PRITCHARD is twenty-five years old and works in hospital administration. His interests include Dark Age and Medieval history, reading, music and films. He has always enjoyed writing, especially in a macabre vein. His first published fiction, *The Fifth Horseman*, was inspired by Geoffrey Chaucer, Sergio Corbucci and Michael Wood.

FICTION FILE 6

STUART JACKSON



Stuart Jackson talks to John Gilbert about *Tracers*, his new SF/AIDS chiller that takes the potential terror of an AIDS epidemic to its realistic conclusion.

It was only a matter of time before someone came up with an SF novel about that most delicate and deadly of subjects: AIDS. However, we should be thankful that it was first time novelist Stuart Jackson who broached the subject in fictional form rather than some goremeister out for a joy ride and a quick profit.

'The novel came about as a result of two or three things,' says Jackson. 'The first is that I'm a partner in a video training company, so I write film scripts, and in that sense writing a novel is very much an extended process.'

The book follows the activities of a special agent who traces AIDS carriers and reports them to a paranoid central government which then deals with them. 'The idea first occurred when I was at a meeting, because I work in the health service, and we were discussing the impact of two AIDS patients on our district. At that stage, like most health authorities, we were facing an overspend. The drugs regime was £2,000 for each patient a week. That works out at about £200,000 a year, and as we were about that much overspent we thought: 'If we get ten of these we're in real problems'.

'It grew from then. The issue was the great concern to protect the confidentiality of people, but not really to take on the full social consequences. AIDS is not yet a notifiable disease; there's a concern to protect the confidentiality of the patient, which is all well and good, but if we continue in that way, what will the situation be when we suddenly wake up to find out what reality is?'

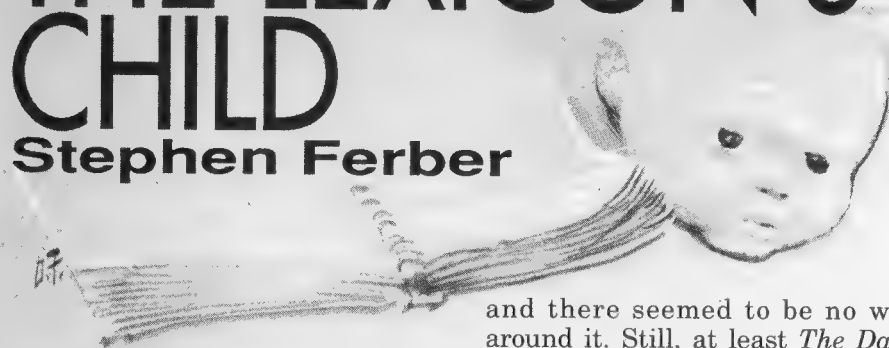
'When I was writing the book, I was aware that in certain parts of Germany they were talking about camps. There was talk in Sweden about putting all AIDS sufferers on an island, and Cuba now requires anyone who's been out of the country to have a blood test when they return. If they're HIV positive then they get put in a camp.'

Jackson believes that the scenario in his book is one of the possible futures for our society if the current attitude of ignorance continues. *Tracers* is there to put the case intelligently and, along with some of the best science fiction, to act as a warning. 'The initial slant of the popular press that it is a 'gay disease' has meant that many people do see that it's not their problem. It attacks gays in the States, but it's a heterosexual disease too. The figures would suggest that it is certainly into the heterosexual population now, but the spread is slow and less discernible than it is in gays. But the gay population has identified the risk and taken steps to protect themselves, and the heterosexual community will have to do the same.'

***Tracers* is published by Sphere in paperback and is Stuart Jackson's first novel. He intends to stay with the area of speculative (not necessarily science) fiction in the near future and to continue to write about conspiracy and paranoia.**

THE LEXICON'S CHILD

Stephen Ferber



The Coke had gone flat. He set the glass aside and returned to the business of signing the books reserved for the mail order customers. In some he drew crude sketches of faeries, others he just signed and dated. He looked at his watch, the session was scheduled to run until four, it was twenty-five past three now and no one had been up to the desk for ten minutes. Closing the last of the books he turned to the young assistant sitting beside him. He thought about suggesting calling it a day but bit it back. She was wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the book's cover art — a more accomplished painting than he could ever hope to achieve himself, although he still retained pretensions in that direction — 'STEPHEN FERBER... His sensational new bestseller... THE DARK REALM' it proclaimed. Judging by today's poor showing, the hype seemed a little premature.

If ever an author had peaked too early, it was he. *The Skin Game*, his first novel, had done remarkable business, so much so that his publishers had followed it up with a book of short stories, *Graveside*, a patchy collection of horrors which were actually the first things he had written. It had amused him that many of the companies who had sent rejection slips insisting that collections of short horror fiction didn't sell were clamouring for it the moment *The Skin Game* hit the bestseller lists.

He'd actually finished *The Dark Realm* four years ago, but had kept it back to hide the fact that for nearly three years he had produced nothing new. He had come across that wall that all writers dread,

and there seemed to be no way around it. Still, at least *The Dark Realm* looked like it had been years in the making, weighing in at a little over eight hundred pages — which had prompted one reviewer to quip 'Until now, Ferber's books have been in the hard to put down category, his latest... is equally hard to pick up.'

And that was one of the kinder ones. Even the fantasy magazines had called his faerie adventure 'lightweight'. Privately, he had seen it as an attempt to break out of the genre trap. At signings and conventions alike he often bemoaned the fact that his kind of fiction was not regarded as legitimate or mainstream, that 'imaginative' books were not reviewed in the literary pages of *The Times* or *The Guardian*. Yet those who knew him saw, beyond the veil of these breastbeating attacks, the rantings of someone aching for a chance to grasp the glittering prizes that literary credibility offered.

Ferber picked up his collection of pens and slipped them in his jacket pocket.

'Well, almost over,' the girl said. 'I'm sorry I couldn't shift a few more for you.' The girl looked past him at the traffic stalled along Oxford Street. 'The rain probably kept a lot of people away.' He nodded and stole a glance at his watch again.

'Twenty minutes to go,' the girl said. 'Maybe there'll be a last minute rush. Care for a refill?'

She picked up the glass and weaved her way through a knot of customers before disappearing through a staff door at the back of the shop. He watched her for a moment before turning back to his desk. He had not been expecting any one, so the tall girl standing before the desk made him jump.

She leaned across the table, her hair dripping onto the pile of books

before him, and slipped a cool hand over his own. He looked up at her, too startled to speak. She was dark skinned, late teens early twenties, Ferber guessed. But her eyes looked much older. Before he had time to react she was speaking to him.

'I know you have a problem Mr Ferber, I'm here to help you get over it.'

It was not her body, as he so naively thought, that was on offer, but something far more valuable, far more... cerebral.

Over the next six months he and the girl, Rian, became inseparable. Before, Ferber would never have dreamed of collaborating, he couldn't face the problems, the petty squabbles over every word, every plotpoint. But that did not happen here. She simply told him stories. Such stories. The moment she started to tell him of *The Windwalkers* he was enraptured. It was a tale, she said, that had to be told. It was as if her whole life depended upon it.

She assured him that she wanted no payment for her work and, more importantly, no credit. Her only request was for board and lodging. He had a large mews flat in the centre of town with four bedrooms he never used, so this was no problem. Furthermore, despite all the offers that had poured in after the publication of *The Skin Game* (which had featured a heavily retouched photo by the wife of a dead Sixties' pop star on the back cover) he had had no lovers. Which made keeping the girl's presence a secret all the more easy.

During the day Rian would sit in his study and talk of the mythical creatures who walked between the clouds, who came upon the natives of distant desert lands and slowly drained their souls. She talked of the camps where health officials tried to come to terms with the silent holocaust which was happening about them. How the world's press had written of famines and disease but never listened to the tales the village elders told around their campfires. They spoke, these old men, of lights that danced in the desert sky, of whirlwinds that left children blind, and of creatures — willowy, stick-like shadows of things — that came in the darkness.

In the evenings, he replayed the



tapes while the girl slept. Her lilting voice, her eloquent phrases, the sheer brightness of her imagery, brought her story to life. It had *that* feel about it, 'dreamlike', and yet somehow there was a 'reality' there. It was topical too — the great fundraising events for Africa, the endless newsreel footage — had touched everybody's life, yet, in the telling, her tale did not seem exploitative. There was horror here, but not the horror of paperback originals. It was horror with dignity. Its frights were not cheap fairground thrills, but ones that crept, and smothered, and gnawed at the soul.

As the weeks progressed, as the bones of the idea became fleshed with characters who lived and breathed, who had doubts and weaknesses and triumphs and passion, Ferber became more and more convinced that what he was writing (he preferred to think of it as *his* baby) was not just great fantasy, but great literature too. The future positively glittered.

They talked less as the weeks turned to months. Somehow they didn't need to. There was a symbiosis between them that Ferber found more painful with each passing hour. Increasingly he left her alone during the daylight hours, because he almost couldn't bear to breathe the same air. He promoted *The Dark Realm* vigorously, accepting invitations from even the smallest of family bookshops.

Mostly nobody came.

Her work rate never faltered — one C60 cassette per day. In transposing the tapes, he had already filled six discs. He altered very little, her sense of structure was near faultless. Her prose *flowed*. She seldom faltered in the delivery of her narration, the sentences just seemed to pour from her. Occasionally she would use archaic words he had to look up, and upon doing so, and searching through his Thesaurus, he would find that her usage could not be bettered. The girl was a living lexicon.

As he sat in his darkened study reading the glowing screen before him, he realised that every word looked like he had written it. He knew she had read all his other books, but he hadn't realised there were so many nuances that defined his work; or that they could be so consummately imitated.

Another thing he failed to notice was how much weight the girl was putting on.



Her screaming woke him. Ferber rolled over and looked at the clock radio on the bedside table. Its figures burned in the darkness. It was just after four. He threw the bedclothes to the floor. She cried out again.

He flailed around in the darkness, catching the corner of his dresser with his knee, before snapping on the room light. Dimly he realised he was naked; it didn't matter. Throwing open the door, he ran down the corridor and leapt up the small flight of stairs to the next landing. The door to the girl's room yawned open. Inside Ferber could see the grey tangle of sheets on the bed. Her vanity table lay split open on the floor, its shattered drawers leaking cosmetics. One of the prints on her wall had been tilted off kilter. At first he didn't notice the bloody handprint etched beside it. But then he threw on the light and the full devastation of the room struck him. It was as if some infernal dervish had danced through the room scattering her clothes, shredding her dresses with its cusped teeth. But she was not there.

He looked down at his feet, aware for the first time that the carpet was wet. The trail of blood led halfway down the landing to his study. Ferber covered the distance in seconds.

The only light in the study was the green glow from the wordprocessor as it scrolled through the final chapters of *The Windwalkers* which Ferber had typed in earlier that evening. At first he couldn't see the girl, he could just hear her sobbing quietly in the darkness. Then he caught sight of the white of her nightdress. She was huddled beneath the workstation. There was a dark patch perhaps six feet square in the centre of the room. The strong, coppery smell told him what it was.

'Jesus... God...' he said over and over as he started towards her.

'That's close enough.' The girl shrank back against the wall.

'You're hurt. Please... let me help you.'

'I'm fine now.'

'There's blood everywhere. You

need help.' He knelt down, oblivious to the slick wetness, and reached out his hand to her. She didn't take it.

'It's all right. It's over now... I've finished.'

'Finished what? For pity's sake let me help you.'

'Finished Creating for you, Stephen.'

And then she lifted up her nightdress.

The child was tiny. Its pale limbs moved slowly in the green light. It turned its head towards him, its eyes not yet open. The last vestiges of a caul clung to its face like a Muslim veil. Rian put her hand across its belly. Its umbilical had been cut, and there was no sign of any afterbirth. Despite its size, the infant was perfectly formed, Ferber found himself unconsciously counting its fingers and toes and looking for any sign of deformity of the joints. He found none. The light from the monitor turned the streaks of blood and amniotic fluid across the child's abdomen into zebra stripes. The girl's legs, too, were stained black in the green light. It was many minutes before either of them spoke.

She wouldn't let him take her to hospital, and had created so much when he suggested it that soon Ferber thought better of the idea also. She did, however, agree that he should call a doctor in the morning and that both she and the baby should be given a thorough check-up. Besides, she looked absolutely exhausted, and what she needed most now was rest.

They didn't talk of the practicalities of the situation, although Ferber had a couple of hundred questions he was itching to ask, but he realised that this was the wrong time to get into specifics, and she was grateful for that.

After he had bathed her and put her back to bed, Ferber returned to his own room and sat in the armchair in the corner. He knew there was little chance of him sleeping. The same questions kept coming at him. How could he have been so blind? Even if the child was a few months premature, she must have been carrying it when they first met. So why hadn't she told him she was pregnant? Maybe she didn't find out until she had moved in. Perhaps she thought he'd throw her out if she told him. And then the cynic in him would

arise — what if she knew all along, and this whole thing was so that she had somewhere to live whilst she carried the child? What if she'd just been using him? But then he would see the almost completed *Windwalkers* manuscript stacked on the bedside table, and he'd think that even if it were true, it was still a pretty fair deal.

One thing was certain. The child was not his. He hadn't laid a finger on her since she arrived. Nor did he know if she had any desires in that direction, if she did she had shown him no sign of it. Perhaps she just knew. Women often did. His publishers did their utmost to present him as a handsome red-blooded heterosexual (*The Skin Game* and *The Dark Realm* both had their fair share of racy sex scenes), and had garnered him a crop of x-rated fan letters, front door keys and lacy underwear, but in truth women were of no interest to him. Never had been and never would be.

He'd only ever slept with two women. One was a fan who'd come on to him in the bar at The World Fantasy Convention, the other was his agent, Judy Chambers. Both were one-offs, done for effect rather than for anything as grand as love or even lust. When he eventually told his agent, she had warned him that if that particular skeleton ever came out of his closet, certain publishers would exclude him from their lists, at least two of the big chains would no longer carry his titles, and he could forget guesting on *Wogan* or *Saturday Matters* for a long time to come.

Sometime after six he must have drifted asleep, because the next thing he knew was hearing Maria, his cleaner arrive just before eleven. It took him a few moments to remind himself of what had happened earlier, and to convince himself of its reality. He splashed some water on his face and took a mouthful of toothpaste before climbing the stairs to the girl's bedroom. Whilst he had slept it appeared that she had been busy. The upturned furniture had been righted, and the bloodstains sponged from the walls. Only the dark brown stain along the landing carpet remained as evidence of the child's torrid birth. That and the baby itself. It lay in the girl's bed sleeping soundly, its tiny body swathed in crisp, white pillowcases.

It was only after half an hour of frantic searching, that Ferber finally accepted that Rian had left the house, and another two days before he came to terms with the fact that she had probably gone for good.

Despite the major upheaval the girl had caused in his life, things fell rapidly into place after she left. Maria, who had always wanted a child, quickly stepped into the role of surrogate mother, and Ferber, who had never liked children, only had to look at the kid to become all gooeey-eyed. He had the builders in to convert one of the spare bedrooms into a nursery, and spent as much time with the baby as he could. There was never any thought of submitting the child to

'The light from the monitor turned the streaks of blood and amniotic fluid across the child's abdomen into zebra stripes'

the authorities.

For a few hours every day Ferber took to the streets and searched the bookshops along Oxford Street and Charing Cross Road. Somehow, if he was to find the girl anywhere, he expected it to be browsing through the latest novels in *Waterstones* or *Corbetts*. He attended signings by other authors, trying to spot her amongst the queues. He wondered if she had worked with other writers, ghostwriting bestsellers in return for nothing more than food and a warm bed. It was tempting to think that perhaps she had.

After three weeks, he gave up any hope of finding her.

The *Windwalkers* manuscript had been accepted enthusiastically by his agent, who had rung him near breathless with excitement one morning at three a.m. to tell him that it was the best thing she had read all year, and that she was convinced it was going to be a huge success.

More importantly, she reaffirmed Ferber's belief that it was a 'crossover' book, and that she would do her utmost to see it was marketed as such. At last, the ranks of the Literatti beckoned. If he played his cards right he

wouldn't need to write again for a long time, which was probably no bad thing considering the stagnant state of his ideas pool.

He called the child Max, and as the weeks progressed spent more and more time with the boy. As he looked at the kid playing happily in his playpen, Ferber couldn't help but wonder about the boy's parents. It was almost uncanny how closely, even at this early stage, Max resembled Ferber. Maria had alerted him to it first. Of course, she presumed he *was* the father anyway, but as soon as she mentioned it, he began to notice an alarming number of similarities. It wasn't just the obvious ones, like hair and eye colour, but expressions and gestures too were replicated in miniature. Perhaps Max shared his mother's gift for mimicry. The child's skin was visibly lighter than Rian's, as were its eyes. In fact, Ferber saw nothing in the child of its mother, which spooked him just a little. Either way, Max was as happy, healthy and well-adjusted as any parent could have hoped.

All that changed with a phone call.

Hollywood had never come calling for Stephen Ferber before. *The Skin Game* had been optioned for six months by some tin-pot British company before it became a bestseller, but the movie had never reached the scripting stage.

He'd let it go for £500 in those early days, which made the figures his agent gushed at him down the phone impossibly tempting. And all this before the book was even published. Dreams came no sweeter, even in Tinseltown. By the time he put down the receiver half an hour later, Ferber was convinced that both he, and his baby *The Windwalkers*, were blessed.

The day after the phone call, Max developed a fever which was followed rapidly by the outbreak of a livid rash across his chest and neck. By the evening, a matrix of hard red wheals had risen on his upper torso, they continued down his back and across the cheeks of his buttocks. At Maria's insistence Ferber called doctor Meacham out to look at the infant. By the time he arrived, two hours after he was called, Max had taken to scratching at the contusions and had caused a number of them to weep.

The doctor examined for some time the scar-like ridges that marked the kid's body, before hastily writing out a prescription for a course of antibiotics which he said should help take the swelling down. The child's temperature was a little above average but was nowhere near as high as it had been when Maria had taken it earlier that afternoon.

'So what's wrong with him?' Ferber asked at last, when it became obvious that Meacham was offering little more than vagueries. The older man turned away, eager to avoid any prolonged eye contact, and fiddled with the clasp on his briefcase.

'It's nothing to worry about...' the doctor replied, his brusque Irish brogue wavering slightly. 'A few days' rest, try and stop him scratching if you can, keep him and his bedclothes clean. Plenty of baths...'

'Of course, but what's wrong with him?'

The doctor fingered his beard for a moment before replying. 'Chickenpox,' he said eventually, 'just a rather uncommon variety.'

And because he was a doctor, Stephen Ferber believed him.



He and Maria took it in turns to stay with Max. They were anxious silent hours, during which Ferber found his mind wandering to thoughts of the young girl who had turned his life upside down. He tried to chart how his life might have been if she hadn't appeared at that signing, or if he had declined her offer to help him over his writer's block. Everything had happened so quickly he had not really had time to think about Max's future. If she never came back, would the child, like her book *The Windwalkers*, be accepted as his? Could he accept that responsibility? The more he asked that question of himself, the more he came to realise that perhaps the two came hand in hand, and that probably he already had.

Two days later, as Meacham had promised, the infant was back to normal, and Ferber thought little more about it, other than wondering at the speed of Max's recovery. But he was, after all, an extraordinary child, and little about him surprised Ferber any more. If someone told him Max

would be walking and talking within six months he'd probably have believed that too.

Something that Stephen Ferber would never have believed six months previously was that he'd be sitting in the first class lounge of a 747 bound for Los Angeles to talk about a film of one of his books. And not just any film, but one that would be billed as a major motion picture, with enough money in the budget to settle the gross national debt of a dozen Third World countries.

Ferber looked out of the window as the aircraft began its final descent into LAX. It was a hot, muggy day and there wasn't much to see. He remembered something his agent had told him once, and smiled to himself. 'That's not smog over Los Angeles... it's an air of bullshit.'

There was a limousine waiting to take him to his hotel which was a good forty minutes' drive through the lunchtime traffic. His driver, a Mexican called Raul seemed to lose interest in him when he said he was a writer. He got an idea of why, a couple of hours later as he sat in his hotel room watching *America Tonight*. They ran a feature where they stopped ten people at random on Hollywood Boulevard and asked them how the script was going. Eight out of ten came up with variations on 'it's in development, we're looking for financing, or having a final polish.' These days, it seemed, the short order cooks at *Arbies* and the waitresses at *Dennys* were no longer waiting for the big acting break, they all wanted to be screenwriters and script doctors.

The following morning a car picked him up from his hotel and took him down to the production offices on South Robertson Boulevard. The building was less grand than he had imagined, but it was good to give flesh at last to an address that had only been a heading on the almost endless flood of faxes which had passed between the studio, his agent and his lawyer. Less than two months had passed since he had seen the first drafts of option and assignment, and now they were on the verge of being exercised. Judy had arranged a deal, which would pay him handsomely, and her, 20% of that figure. He went into the meeting excited and confident, and emerged thirty minutes later

richer but deflated. He checked out of his hotel that afternoon, called Maria from the airport, and two hours later was on a flight back to London.

At first he couldn't bear to look at the handsomely bound script he had been handed at the end of the meeting. But when the in-flight movie began and he realised he'd seen it, he settled down to compound his agony. He got the stewardess to fix him two straight shots of Jack Daniels to soften the blow. He read the title

'She could hear the sound of his bones cracking before she reached the door'

page... *The Windwalkers*, Screenplay by Charles Baez. God, he'd been naive. He'd walked into the meeting with the first few pages of his own screenplay, certain that they would jump at the chance of Stephen Ferber adapting his own, soon to be bestselling, novel. It all made such sense to him — who better to write an adaptation than the author himself? Who could know the story better? Who else could give the characters such psychological weight as he could? *The Windwalkers* was his baby, damn it! *His baby!* Why was it that whenever Hollywood gets hold of a shit-hot story they get someone else in to rewrite it?

Ten pages in, he got to the first major story change. He went into a kind of stupor, and sat dumbfounded, mouth open, looking at the script on his knees. His heart raced. The blood thumped in his temples. The woman across the aisle from him called a stewardess when she saw a trail of saliva slide from his open mouth onto the page. She plainly thought he had suffered a stroke. The hostess caught his wrist.

'Are you all right sir?' He didn't move. She asked him again. This time he snapped out of it.

'Oh... Sorry,' he spluttered, rubbing his hand across his face. 'Just a bit of a shock, that's all.'

The stewardess caught sight of the open script on his knees.

'Scary story?' she asked.

All Stephen Ferber could do was nod.

Half an ocean away, The Lexicon's

Child began to scream. Maria heard the baby's shrieks through the intercom Ferber had rigged up in the nursery. Her dinner tray crashed to the floor as she leapt from the settee and tore up the stairs to the child's room. She could hear the sound of his bones cracking before she reached the door. When she turned on the bedroom light and saw Max's tiny body arching and twisting in the cot, she began to scream as well.

Two hours later, Stephen Ferber silently put the script into his briefcase, got up from his chair and walked to the toilet at the back of the aircraft. Then he locked himself inside and promptly threw up. The bastards had changed everything. Not just minor plotpoints, names and locations — that was to be expected. These were major structural changes. The body of the work had been eviscerated, great chunks of it had been hacked out, fatuous subplots had been added, the events that had made so much sense when Rian narrated them had been reshuffled and were now an incoherent jumble.

And after the rage came the guilt. He'd sold them his child, that was the bottom line, wasn't it? The girl had given him something more perfect than creation and he'd pissed it away. Sold it, to be cut up and butchered, and exhibited like a freak.

Maria met him at Heathrow. She looked worse than he felt. Black streams of mascara bruised her eyes. Her mouth was a thin colourless line. She could hardly stand up. Ferber ran to her and threw his arms around her. The arrivals lounge was virtually deserted. A chauffeur with an idiot board stood by the exit.

'Where's Max?' Ferber asked. Maria put her fist to her mouth and bit it until the skin broke. He closed his palm over her knuckles, and she led him to where the child was.

Stephen Ferber leant across the back seat and pulled back the travelling rug. Max still lived, but he didn't look like a child any more. He'd been twisted round, turned inside out... A piteous hank of flesh and gristle squirming on the velour seat cover. The Word and the Flesh, the two things Rian had entrusted to him — Created for him — both were unrecognisable now.

FICTION FILE 7

THOMAS MONTELEONE



Horror and science fiction author Thomas F Monteleone has also gained a reputation for the acerbic wit of his column in the now defunct Horrorstory magazine. As his new novel, *The Apocalypse Man*, comes up for publication, FEAR's John Gilbert asks him for his most recent genre observations.

The horror started for Tom Monteleone with an approach by Paul Olsen, editor of *Horrorstory* magazine. 'He calls me up and says: 'I'm starting a new magazine about horror. It's going to be non-fiction, have you ever written any?' 'Very little,' I say. 'If you want critical essays, I'm definitely not your man.'

Monteleone had written a piece for the

Underwood-Miller Stephen King book *Kingdom Of Fear* (NEL, paperback), but his only other non-fiction work was a column called *Mothers and Fathers Italian Association*. Olsen, however, gave him carte blanche to talk about anything he wanted as long as it was marginally connected with horror. Monteleone agreed, and his acerbic but critically praised column was born.

His outspokenness in the now defunct column has met with many an indignant response. 'I'm quite good friends with Dennis (*Red Dreams*) Etchison, at least I was until I knocked old Bob (*Psycho*) Bloch around the box a few times. I think Bob's a dear man, but I think his time has passed, he's lost the edge. His stories don't do what they used to do to me, and I said it.

And Dennis got pissed off with me. He said, 'You might be right, you might be wrong, but was it necessary to say it?' And I said, 'It's never necessary. I just said it because it was my opinion. In a lot of cases people feel like the Emperor has no clothes, and they're afraid to say it. This is not the gospel of St Thomas. I could be wrong, you can disagree.'

I ask him to comment on Stephen King, another bestseller who dived out of the action for a while. 'He got very lazy for a while. His early work was a knockout. Let's face it, he set up this field for all of us. I think he got lazy and turned out some pretty mediocre shit for a while. I liked *Misery*, I thought he was on a come back, and I'm reading *The Dark Half* now. It's got this incredible momentum, you know where it's going but you don't care. It's okay that you know because he does it with some of his old style. The thing he does best is his characters, and I think he's back with that.'

He believes that, although Edgar Allan Poe and H P Lovecraft were probably influenced by the traditional British horror story, the wheel has come full circle and many Britons are emulating American writers, like Stephen King. 'I think Clive (Barker) definitely does, but there are people here who are following their own drives. I've always admired Graham Masterton. He's a fairly young guy, but he's been around; he's pretty much always told his own story. But, yeah, I would say the American influence is pervasive in general.'

Monteleone feels the same way about Ramsey Campbell who, he says, has a unique English voice, but he is also worried that the future may be full of Campbell clones. 'There has to be a diversity. If we all start trying to cookie-cut our fiction and make it read the same, we're going to have a big problem. Someone's going to say, 'What's the sense of reading Dennis when I can read John or Tom and they're all the same?' That's not good. You must have that uniqueness of voice and personality.'

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SLUGGED!!!

TREMORS

Starring: Kevin Bacon, Fred Ward, Finn Carter,
Michael Gross, Reba McEntire
Director Ron Underwood
Distributors UIP
Cert 15



Written off by American reviewers as merely an efficiently nostalgic tribute to Fifties 'bug movies', *Tremors* is a thumpingly good watch which not only demonstrates more wit than any lame brain 'horror pastiche' in recent years, but also succeeds in whipping up some nail-biting tension and delivering a good few full-blooded shocks to boot.

Out in the gleaming desert surrounding small town Perfection, Nevada, feisty seismologist Rhonda LeBeck (Carter) is registering some hefty earth tremors, indicative of movement way below the ground. Knockabout local handymen Valentine McKee (Bacon) and Earl Basset (Fred Ward) are none too bothered by such highbrow hassles, being more concerned with the fetid and rotting corpse of a peculiar snake-like creature which has attached itself to the axle of their pick-up. Viewed at first by the locals as a possibly lucrative scientific find ('Let's call it a 'Graboid!') it soon

becomes apparent that the seemingly harmless discovery is merely one fleshy tentacle of something far more worrisome: a giant man eating worm, which zips along underground, surfacing only to devour anything on land that moves. From there on in, it's 'small-isolated-community-under-seige-by massive-ugly-beasties' time, as a team of super-slugs attempts to eat its way through the population of Perfect before our heroes can make it to the rocky safety of the nearby mountains.

Executive produced by the ubiquitous Gale Anne Hurd, *Tremors* manages to pull off that most difficult of sci-fi/horror feats: namely, showing you the monsters repeatedly, in broad daylight, without making them look silly. Indeed, Tom Woodruff Jr and Alec Gillis' creations are a pleasure throughout, beautifully enhanced by Alexander Gruszynski's spaciouly panoramic camerawork. Tip-top performances from the cast are equally rewarding, particular plaudits going to Michael Gross and Reba McEntire as a pair of besieged survivalists who've been waiting all their lives for a chance to slug it out with the impending Armageddon. Yes folks, *Tremors* has got it all: big monsters, big action, big laughs... Big thumbs up!

Mark Kermode



ROUGH JUSTICE

THE PUNISHER

Starring: Dolph Lundgren, Louis Gossett Jr, Jeroen Krabbe, Nancy Everhard, Kim Miyori
Director Mark Goldblatt
Distributor Castle Premiere Releasing
Cert 18



When his wife and kids are killed by the local Italian Mafia, top cop Frank Castle (Lundgren) performs a disappearing act, resurfacing as 'The Punisher', a bike riding leather-clad psycho who deals out rough justice to wrong-doers with an assortment of hardcore hardware.

Five years later, Castle's ex-partner Jake Berkowitz (Gossett) teams up with ball-busting detective Samantha Leary (Everhard) to track down the errant enforcer and bring him to justice, becoming in the process embroiled in an escalating gang war between the Mafia and the Yakuza — a team of Japanese hoods specialising in martial arts, led by the fascistic (and fetishistic) Lady Tanaka (Miyori). Tracked by the police, hated by the mob, and judged by God alone, Castle finds himself coming to the aid of the fiendish Gianni Franco (Krabbe) who, having murdered Castle's family, has now lost his own child to the wrath of the exploding feud.

Adapted from the splendidly cynical and worryingly popular American cartoon strip, Mark Goldblatt's low budget movie manages to combine slick action sequences and quickfire acidic dialogue, whilst still retaining a modicum of healthily ironic pessimism. '125 murders in five years!' sneers a wonderfully sinewy Gossett when finally confronted with his corruption-crazed nemesis... 'What do you call that?!' 'Work in progress,' intones Dolph, his wall-to-wall designer stubble (courtesy the make-up dept) stretched to its outer limits in its attempt to encompass his mind-bogglingly huge chin.

Whilst the tortuously twisted plot is occasionally too convoluted for its own good, Ian Baker's nippy chasing camerawork keeps the pace frenetic throughout, whether tracking the paths of Castle's insanity through the sewers of his darkened underworld, or sitting on the blade of yet another well-aimed, razor-sharp projectile. Sprinkled throughout with liberal doses of mindless violence (from martial arts mayhem to machine gun masturbation) *The Punisher* pumps up the action, whilst astutely pulling its punches just enough to be palatable.

Are you ready for correction?

Mark Kermode



■ Dolph: sporting designer stubble and doling out the punishment

I BOUGHT A VAMPIRE MOTORCYCLE

Starring: Neil Morrissey, Amanda Noar, Michael Elphick, Anthony Daniels, Daniel Peacock
Director Dirk Campbell
Distributor Hobo Films
Cert 18



Motorcycles are about the only things to link Michael Elphick and Neil Morrissey of the *Boon* television series with the shenanigans in this movie. Here we not only have a tale of a two-wheeler with a talent for sucking blood, groups of Hell-bent motorcycle thugs and strange dreams of talking turds, but also a reversal of lead roles.

It is, after all, Morrissey who takes the lead as Noddy, a young courier who buys a Norton with a life of its own. In a past existence it was owned by a biker who practiced black magic and who, because of his bike, was killed by a rival gang one dark, smoggy night. The Norton changes hands, but not before a stream of blood gurgles into its petrol tank.

Noddy takes delivery of his machine and his mechanic friend Buzzer (Peacock) offers to give it the once over, nicking the expensive petrol cap as a memento. In the morning the police, in the form of the garlic-chewing Inspector (Elphick), invite Noddy around to Buzzer's house. He's been horribly killed, there are bloody skid marks on the walls, and Buzzer's head has been dumped in a plastic wrapping.

The bike becomes increasingly powerful at night and goes out for quick, bloody but hilarious, killing jaunts. Bodies pile up, Noddy starts to believe in the vampiric qualities of the bike and calls on the services of a priest, played with anything but religious zeal by *Star Wars* C3-PO actor Anthony Daniels. The priest disobeys all the strictures of the Catholic church and performs the most inane of exorcisms in Noddy's garage. Needless to say, he soon loses a few fingers, and his ministrations make things worse.





■ Heads you lose: Daniel Peacock in I Bought A Vampire Motorcycle

Morrissey, Elphick and Daniels have no doubt put their reputations on the line with this picture, but they are in good company. Burt (Pink Panther) Kwouk plays a Chinese takeaway restaurant manager, David (Boon) Daker plays it relatively straight as the local cop shop's desk sergeant and Ed (Skippy) Devereux wades in as the owner of a local pub. Their involvement lends a touch of class to the proceedings, and the special effects by Image Animation are, with a few dodgy exceptions, outrageous.

While the movie is a good 20 minutes too long, the cast seem to have enjoyed themselves while making it; and the preview audience certainly enjoyed watching it. If nothing else, *Vampire Motorcycle* proves that Britain can still cough up creative teams to make low budget genre films.

John Gilbert



RE-ANIMATOR 2

Starring: Jeffrey Combs, Bruce Abbott, David Gale, Claude Earl Jones, Kathleen Kinmont
Director Brian Yuzna
Distributor Medusa
Cert 18

Five years after the 'Miskatonic Massacre' which concluded *Re-Animator*, doctors Herbert West (Combs) and Dan Cain (Abbott) find themselves in the South American jungle where, using the amniotic fluid from a rare iguana, West is further developing his zombifying re-agent. The new improved serum now apparently has the ability to animate severed body parts, enabling West both to create and subsequently breathe life into any misbegotten creation of his choice.

Returning to hospital duties in America, Cain shuns West's morbid activities until, consumed with grief at the loss of beautiful patient Gloria (Kinmont), he agrees to cooperate in the construction of a 'new woman'. Using Gloria's beautiful visage, and the



dismembered heart of Cain's lost love Meg, the gruesome twosome set about assembling their dream lover from an assortment of second hand parts stolen from the local morgue.

Working from a storyline co-written by director Yuzna, scriptwriters Woody Keith and Rick Fry have here attempted to recapture both the flavour of fatal farce so prominent in *Re-Animator*, as well as the Shelleyan philosophy espoused by James Whale's groundbreaking 1935 classic *Bride Of Frankenstein*. Contrary to all expectations, the result is utterly dire, lumbering inconsistently from one orchestrated effects set piece to the next, arousing neither the intellect nor the bile, and leaving the viewer simply bored and bewildered.

Yuzna's plagiarism of his and Gordon's original is both clumsy and moribund, lacking the wit of its predecessor, and opting instead for second rate *fantastique* fumbblings. Neither has Yuzna made any great concessions toward continuity: whilst *Re-Animator* ended with Dr Cain's dismembered head being crushed to a pulp and splattered against a hospital wall, it here mysteriously returns intact to occupy, once again, a central role. Even the much vaunted special effects are on the dodgy side, nowhere more noticeably than during the supposedly amusing reconstitution of the household dog — the puppet is duff, the humour lame, and the point entirely lost. Only the impressive bride make-up is worth

■ Moon 44: Malcolm McDowell

the price of the admission ticket, and it's a bloody long wait for such scant reward. A major disappointment by a major talent, from whom greatness is expected, but mediocrity would have sufficed.

Mark Kermode



MOON44

Starring: Michael Pare, Lisa Eichhorn, Malcolm McDowell, Brian Thompson, Stephen Geoffreys, Jochen Nickel
Director Roland Emmerich
Distributor Medusa Pictures
Cert 15



The year is 2038: the wipeout attacks on the company's moon mining operations have intensified and thefts of ore-carrying shuttles are putting its financial future in jeopardy. Faced with the threat of a very hostile takeover, the boss of this multinational employs undercover agent Felix to find out just who is sabotaging the operation. Felix is not, however, informed that, due to harsh company policy, this could be a suicide mission.

He goes to Moon44 as one of the convicts now being employed by the company to fight off any spaceborn assaults to their operations — yes, it's

The Dirty Dozen in space helmets. The defence craft are little more than space helicopters which must be steered carefully through the channels mined in the moon's surface. Each is guided from moonbase by one of a team of whiz kids, led by Cookie (Geoffreys) who is a dope peddler but a good guy underneath. These computer teens hold the lives of the convicts in their hands during a training flight and, when one of their number is raped in the shower by Scooter (Nickel), the emotional temperature rises until ol' Scoot gets his chips.

Then all heaven breaks loose, as the real enemy attacks.

Moon44 is a confidently made piece of space hokum in which the ambitious sets and overwrought dialogue occasionally let the light of reality onto the screen, destroying the intergalactic illusion. Nevertheless, director Emmerich keeps the action coming and on video this should do very well. It's not for the big screen, though.

John Gilbert



BLACK RAINBOW

Starring: Rosanna Arquette, Jason Robards, Tom Hulce, Mark Joy
Director Mike Hodges
Distributor Palace
Cert 18



In a genre now dominated by special effects, the quieter terrors of psychic premonition have become unfashionable. And while this atmospheric psychological thriller is unlikely to revive the sub-genre singlehanded, its apocalyptic ecological sub-text does move it into an intriguing new area.

Rosanna Arquette is impressively controlled as Martha Travis, a psychic who travels the community halls of America's bible belt with her manipulative, whisky-sodden father Walter (Jason Robards). The show is a carefully staged sham, with Martha acting as a 'spiritual telephone exchange for those who want to connect with folks on Earth'. But then reality breaks in on the line. Martha tells a member of the audience that her husband has been shot; she sees feathers everywhere and blood on the wall behind him. The woman insists that her husband is still alive, but Martha's premonition later proves to be true.

Learning that the murdered man was about the blow the whistle on health and safety violations at the local chemical factory, sceptical reporter Gary Wallace (Tom Hulce) follows Martha and her father to the next town. There, she first gives and then receives a warning: she predicts an accident at the local nuclear power station, then learns from Wallace that the hit man who shot the factory worker now may be after her.

On a modest budget of \$7 million, Hodges makes the most of the flavourful locations and wisely plays down the pyrotechnics in favour of strong acting and involving drama. The taut thriller elements, though, don't grip the imagination in the same way, tending for example to defuse the impact of Martha's 'green' speech about caring for the here and now instead of hankering for the hereafter. This sense of anticlimax aside, Hodges' intelligent picture deserves to find a wide audience.

Nigel Floyd



RENTAL VIDEO

CROSSTIME CAPER

CLOWN HOUSE

Starring: Nathan Forrest Winters, Brian McHugh
Director Victor Salva
Distributor Entertainment In Video
Cert 18, 90 mins



Casey has a morbid fear of clowns. He ran away from one the last time the circus came to town, and ever since then the whole neighbourhood has been laughing at him. Worse still, his big brother (Rockwell) thinks he's a wimp and persists in teasing him. Worst of all, the circus is about to make a return visit, and this time Casey really will have something to cry about.

A bunch of lunatics has escaped from the local asylum. They slaughter the real clowns, don their disguises and eventually discover Casey's home. His mother is out for the evening and he's alone with his two brothers. His bully of a big brother is soon despatched by the clowns and hung from the limb of a tree outside the house while Casey cowers in a bedroom with his bespectacled twin (McHugh). They're chased around the house by a variety of bozos in silk costumes and white faces, from whom they hide in various recesses, and by whom they get discovered again and again. Ho-hum.

Clown House is a cross between Troma's *Rabid Grannies* and EV's *Killer Clowns From Outer Space*, but it lacks the one vital ingredient that gave the wheeze to those two films: namely, humour. The movie is just a succession of mediocre chase sequences, with halfhearted attempts to shock the audience into nervous laughter. Images of clowns may be scary enough, but in this case even the sterling and unsettling work put into the movie by real clown Cheezo, playing the evil Tree, is not enough to liven it up.

John Gilbert



PHANTOM OF THE MALL: ERIC'S REVENGE

Starring: Derek Rydall, Morgan Fairchild, Kari Witman, Rob Estes, Jonathan Goldsmith
Director Richard Friedman
Distributor Prism
Cert 18, 90 mins



Erik, the original phantom of the opera, becomes Eric Matthews, the modern monster, and gets the contemporary treatment in yet another stalk-and-slash attempt to cash in on Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical money-making venture.

To be fair, this piece of mall madness — the British shopping centre just doesn't have the same ring to it — was conceived and shot before Robert England or Charles Dance had a chance to get their masks made. Nonetheless, the film crew would have been better employed dragging shopping bags rather than cameras

MILLENNIUM

Starring: Kris Kristofferson, Cheryl Ladd, Daniel J Travanti, Robert Joy
Director Michael Anderson
Distributor Warner
Cert PG, 102 mins



It's not just the airspace over Gatwick and Heathrow that's crowded; in the skies of the good old US of A, a spectacular collision between a DC-10 and a Boeing 707 begins *Millennium's* cross-time caper.

Bill Smith (Kristofferson) is appointed crash investigator and puts the disaster down to simple computer error, dismissing the copilot's last words which state that the passengers were burnt-up (before the collision) as the babblings of a panicking man. However, privately, Smith is a little puzzled and orders the DC-10 to be reassembled, as far as is possible, until a structural deficiency is discovered. His job is further complicated by Dr Arnold Mayer (Travanti), a part-time lecturer on 'unusual' topics who strangely appears to have a special interest in the case, and stewardess Louise Baltimore (Ladd), who enjoys a recreational evening with Smith before promptly disappearing.

Staying late at the reassembly hangar, Smith discovers a strange device which electrically discharges, knocking him off his feet. Moments later, a small group of women appears in a flash of light. The device is taken off him by one of them, who bears a striking resemblance to Louise Baltimore, though with a trendier hairstyle and a plastic bodysuit. It transpires that Baltimore is from the future, where time travel has been mastered but depopulation is rife. And with a piece of the device still in Smith's hands, Baltimore has to go back to set things right and prevent a cataclysmic 'timequake.'

From the dramatic title sequence, *Millennium* projects the glossy, American soap style of look and direction that so often leads into a tacky, ill-conceived production. Happily, this isn't the case, although the film never loses that TV movie feel.

In both the printed word and in cinema, time travel has been well-used (the phrase 'done to death' springs to mind) and *Millennium* hovers over the paradox principle of things which are altered in the past having far-reaching and unpredictable effects on the present and future. It uses time and its travel to confuse the viewer and make them wonder exactly how and in what order events occurred, and even if it was possible for them to happen that way.

The time skipping seems to be a way of padding out the film's running time — we are constantly being shown sequences of the film that have already been seen. However, the retelling of Smith and Baltimore's evening out includes highly amusing scenes where Baltimore adjusts to a foreign world, and Cheryl Ladd is by far her most appealing in this part of the movie, otherwise she looks as if she is trying to be assertive and a bimbo at the same time. Kristofferson is too matter-of-fact for the romantic lead — a friendly uncle rather than a dashing hero; and my interest in Travanti's Dr Mayer was fuelled only by his inexplicable knowledge of time travel and the intentions of the humans of the future.

When all is said and done, *Millennium* leaves you wondering why so much was made of closeted future humans whom no one cared about. Flashy, firework effects are used in an attempt to jazz things up, but this movie fails to travel substantially in either space or time.

Warren Lapworth



■ Eric's revenge

around the movie's spanking new credit card paradise.

A new shopping mall is about to open to shouts of praise from local residents and businesses, but no one knows that

the hideously disfigured Eric is hiding in the basement and air ducts, knocking off a few security and repair men to kill time. His antisocial behaviour began when a developer sent a hit man to kill him and his family because they

wouldn't move out and make way for the new shopping mall. Eric was having sex with girlfriend Melody at the time and, although she escaped, he was apparently consumed by the flames.

Now, of course, he wants revenge and plans to blow up the mall. First, though, he must kill the hit man who is again after Melody and he must also get rid of her new boyfriend, a convenient and hunky local newspaper reporter. (It's incredible, but Melody ends up in bed with most of the young hunks in this movie, including the hit man.)

Events take a turn for the worse (oh, really?) when Melody confronts Eric and tells him she doesn't want to see him any more. The bomb explodes, but who survives? You can probably guess.

The movie may have a number of things going for it — depending on your point of view — there are sex scenes and prosthetic violence a-plenty. In the end, though heads are lopped off and eyes are gouged out, you're still left with the most unsatisfactory phantom on film. And yes, that even includes De Palma's tawdry parody, *Phantom Of The Paradise*.

John Gilbert





■ Sherman (right) offers advice in millennium

audience into a false sense of security. After all, nothing will happen to this sweet little family before the bad guys are caught, will it? Too right it will, and the action picks up from the moment that Adam's mother goes on that life-support machine.

Needless to say, the film has a fairly happy ending, in the spirit of *Witness*, where Harrison Ford protected a similar child in possession of evidence, but *Final Cut* is tougher than the Ford vehicle and some of the plot twists — not least the dealings with the snuff movie business — are grossly unpalatable. The tension, bare boards photography and nouveau-Spillane dialogue make it a seductive, hard-edged thriller.

John Gilbert



HEATHERS

Starring: Winona Ryder, Christian Slater, Shannen Doherty, Lianne Falk, Kim Walker

Director Michael Lehmann

Distributor New World Pictures

Cert 18, 98 mins



A startlingly idiosyncratic and stylish debut from director Michael Lehmann, *Heathers* combines elements of John Hughes' teen comedy romances with the highly coloured nightmare visions of American suburbia which are quintessentially David Lynch, though it manages to avoid both the folksy sentimentality of the former and the pretentiousness of the latter.

Veronica (Winona Ryder) is a member of the elite female quartet, The Heathers; a high school clique whose popularity depends on beauty, brains, money and acts of extreme bitchiness. When she encounters a new boy in the school, sardonic loner Jason Dean (Christian Slater — Jack Nicholson, eat your heart out...), she begins to question The Heathers' behaviour and ultimately sets herself against ringleader and megabitch Heather Chandler. With JD's encouragement, Veronica decides to give Chandler a taste of her own medicine, and administers a hangover cure which, thanks to JD's interference, proves to be a fatal brew of neat household bleach. After this murder, Veronica becomes sucked into a downward spiral of violence masterminded by the unstable JD, and

■ John Barrett (left) stars as private eye McCarthy in *Final Cut*

WIZARDS OF THE LOST KINGDOM 2

Starring: David Carradine, Bobby Jacoby, Lana Clarkson, Mel Welles

Director Charles B Griffith

Distributor 20:20 Vision

Cert PG, 78 mins



David Carradine returns to the character he created in *Wizards* 1 for more sword and sorcery shenanigans. As The Dark One he helps clumsy wizard Caedman and young boy Tyor in their attempt to destroy the evil ones who are set to bring gloom and doom to the Lost Kingdom.

What could have been a thrilling action-packed saga, despite the apparent low budget, sadly whizzes from one unfunny moment to another, one ill-staged fight to another, and the villains are not only inept, but surround themselves with hordes of guards who fall like nine-pins at the merest wave of a stick.

David Carradine deserves better, and so do fantasy fans. Still, in the absence of better product, I suppose even flawed efforts bring a fleeting sparkle of wizardry. Kids will probably enjoy it, and

as it's all in undiluted modern American they should have no trouble following the intricacies of the plot!

Oliver Frey



FINAL CUT

Starring: John Barrett, Matthew Stewardson, Michael Huff

Director Frans Nel

Distributor New World Video

Cert 18, 90 mins



Adam is a boy with a major problem. No, it's not pimples, but a rather nasty rash of snuff moviemakers who pop up in the most unexpected places and want to capture his last moments on film. He is, of course, a witness to their earlier dirty dealings, when they successfully strangled a witness in a derelict warehouse. But they're not so successful in their attempts to bump off him.

First they almost total his mum and her car and then they tangle with McCarthy, family friend, ex-cop and pissed off private eye, played by John

Barrett, who forgets his martial arts star persona for the duration of the film and produces rather reasonable acting performance.

The pace of the movie is a little slow, but I suspect that the early police procedural scenes are there to lull the



she soon begins to realise that ridding Westerburg High of its unkind and unpleasant elements is going to be more complicated than it at first seemed.

As the corpses mount up, *Heathers* establishes itself very much in the classic tradition of black comedy, but what sets it apart from other films on a similar theme (ie: which deal with the notion that sexual chemistry can lead two people to commit atrocities — see Noel Black's excellent 1968 movie *Pretty Poison* for example) are its upfront admission of 'grand' concerns (JD states that he wants to destroy the whole of Westerburg High because it is a microcosm of a rotten society) and its gleeful handling of male/female role reversal. Veronica is, without question, the central character whose voyage of discovery leads her — on her own terms — to establish total control of the school. 'There's a new sheriff in town,' she declaims, grimy and battle-scarred following her final shoot-out with JD. These factors give the movie a knowing jokiness and a distinct edge and, in this sense, *Heathers* couldn't be anything but a late-Eighties' movie.

Despite a wan ending, which producers New World reputedly foisted upon Lehmann, *Heathers* makes for compelling viewing — funny, self-mocking, classy and sassy — with a script by Daniel Waters which, for originality, knocks spots off your average blockbuster.

Patience Coster



■ Latterday Bonnie and Clyde: Christian Slater and Winona Ryder in *Heathers*



THE BITE

Starring: Jill Schoelen, J Eddie Peck, Jamie Farr, Savina Gersak, Marianne Muellerleile

Director Fred Goodfin

Distributor Entertainment In Video

Cert 15, 105 mins



Nuclear bases have a lot to answer for. Last issue, one caused people to burst into flames in *Spontaneous Combustion*. In *The Bite*, Yellow Sands base causes problems for hero Clark Newman (Peck) and girlfriend Lisa Snipes (Schoelen), who're on a trek across the States to Albuquerque. Against advice from the locals, they take a short cut through Yellow Sands' grounds. On the way, a

tyre blows and, unbeknownst to Clark and Lisa, a snake (obviously a very athletic one — possibly a pole vaulter) sneaks aboard during the unscheduled stop.

Later in the journey, they stop at a grim, run-down gas station where Clark encounters the owner's pet, a highly aggressive snake-headed dog. But this is small fry compared with later events. Clark is bitten on the hand by the stowaway snake and is treated by businessman and part time doctor Harry Morton but, as Clark and Lisa continue their trip, Morton realises he has administered the wrong antidote. Professional credibility and a fascination for reptiles send him in pursuit of Clark, whose hand is gradually transforming... predictably, into a snake's head. Though this metamorphosis is expected, as is the bite which began it, this late-Eighties B-movie is at pains to drag out the basic idea into a whole feature. It pads out the story with tedious, unnecessary conversations between Clark and Lisa, and generally pointless scenes that rapidly induce weariness.

On the positive side, J Eddie Peck

■ Dribble your worst: *The Bite*

and Jill Schoelen play their parts well, as do the majority of the cast. The stumbling block, performance-wise, is tertiary character Harry Morton, who is played by Jamie Farr in the same light, friendly manner as he played his famous Corporal Clinger role in *MASH* — a style which is totally inappropriate. Special effects mirror their creator's monicker, Screaming Mad George: silly and crude.

The Bite is one of the most naff, yawn-inspiring movies I've had the misfortune to view in a long, long time; nothing whatsoever to get your teeth into.

Warren Lapworth



MURDER BY NIGHT

Starring: Robert Urich, Kay Lentz, Michael Ironside

Director Brian Hebb

Distributor CIC

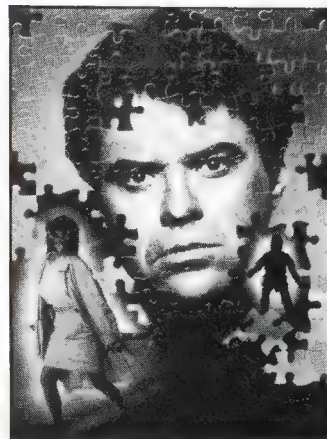
Cert 18, 90 mins



Losing your memory must be the most terrifying sensation you could ever experience, especially when you were present at a murder and might, subconsciously, know the killer's face.

Discovered unconscious at the scene of a brutal hammer murder Allan Strong (Tanner) has amnesia, and it is then up to police psychologist Karen Hicks (Lentz) to discover his past for the chief investigator on the case, played by Michael Ironside.

Soon Strong begins to believe that he is the hammer-wielding serial killer, but such depressing thoughts are shattered



■ *Murder By Night*



when he is attacked by the murderer himself. The need to recover his memory becomes more acute as he realises he is in danger, and the body count continues to rise.

Urich, who once played Dan Tanner in the American television series *Vegas*, puts in a surprisingly effective performance as the man with amnesia while Kay Lentz acts the strong career woman with a mind of her own but a soft spot for her patient — the type of role that has become as clichéd as the airheaded bimbo. Michael Ironside is

true to casting for anyone who's seen the truly appalling *Watchers*, but does his best to add mystery to this set piece.

Neatly shot, with several well-paced shock set pieces, *Murder By Night* is, unfortunately, unoriginal and not as thought-provoking as its PR blurb foretells. If you're an action buff, this is a movie crammed to the brim with one thrill after another. Don't, however, expect another *Manhunter*.

John Gilbert



WITCHTRAP

Starring: James W Quinn, Kathleen Bailey, Judy Tatum, Linnea Quigley
Director Kevin S Tenney

Distributor Video Programme Distributors
Cert 18, 92 mins



Schlock: I thought the true definition of the word had been lost in the mists of time, but director Kevin Tenney, whose past projects include *Night Of The Demons* and *Witchboard*, has placed it firmly

back in the filmmaking dictionary. He's also re-affirmed my faith in the depths to which human nature can sink with a film that is just slightly worse than *Witchcraft 2* (see **FEAR** 14).

The plot is risible. Black magician Avery Lauter's ghost haunts the Lauterhouse mansion, killing guests and generally scaring the bejesus out of the new owner, who decides to call in a psychic research team and a private security team to back them up. They soon learn that Lauter was murdered, his black heart cut out on the altar in the attic and buried somewhere in the house. His remains fester in a jar on the mantelpiece. It becomes apparent that they must slay the ghost before he makes a successful stab at an ancient immortality rite.

The ghoulish goings on get more ridiculous by the moment, as researchers and security men are attacked by showerheads, runaway cars and rogue bullets from a ghost-aimed gun. It all sounds ridiculous, a supposition that's reinforced when we learn that *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* bimbo Linnea Quigley is on the research team. Still, the other members of the cast sink to her level of performance, so this movie's consistent, at least.

The kindest thing one can say about *Witchtrap* is that the movie is reasonably well shot. The one major optical effect is also a cut above most other schlocky horror films, but the writer/director even manages to screw that up by using the same slow motion sequence of Lauter's caped figure several times.

As a fan of *Witchboard*, I had hoped that Tenney, on his shoestring budget,



TIME TWERPS

BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

Starring: Keanu Reeves, Alex Winter, George Carlin

Director Stephen Herek

Distributor Castle Home Video

Cert PG, 86 mins



Their banter drives me mad and their care-free naivety often makes me want to puke, but I most seriously believe that Bill (Winter) and Ted (Reeves) are the freshest thing to happen to fantasy filmmaking in decades. They're the kind of guys you'd roll out with for a quick flip around a fun fair or take on a trip to visit obnoxious aunt Molly. The film's not bad either.

In the beginning, you're as much in the dark as the twerpish twosome. A shades-wearing dude, called Rufus (Carlin) arrives in a time-travelling telephone booth and offers to help them out with their verbal history report, which has to be delivered at their high school the next day. They have real problems because, if they fail, Ted will go to military school and Bill will end up on life's junk heap.

Soon, they're whizzing through time, and picking up historical figures such as Napoleon, Billy The Kid and Socrates, who'll come in handy during the verbal and whose opinions on the present will certainly add a wild flavour to that report.

Things start to go wrong when Napoleon hitchhikes to the future and is looked after, and lost, by Ted's little brother. Eventually, all the time personages end up in jail, and Bill and Ted must get them out not just to pass their test but also — surprise, surprise — to save the future of humanity.

Wickedly funny, if plainly preposterous, *Bill And Ted's Excellent Adventure* exhibits all that's good and fun about independent filmmaking. It's good, clean, family fun (apart from Bill's occasional references to his slight Oedipus complex), which makes a change from much of the material I have to slip through my slot every month.

John Gilbert



■ Wickedly funny: Bill (Alex Winter) and Ted (Keanu Reeves) look to the future



would come up with something original that would re-establish the schlock movie in all its awfulness. It was not to be.

John Gilbert



TEEN VAMP

Starring: Clu Gulager, Karen Carlson, Beau Bishop, Angie Brown, Evans Dietz
Director Samuel Bradford
Distributor 20/20 Vision
Cert 18, 92 mins



Sex becomes a total disaster for greasy teenager Murphy (Bishop) when his whore turns out to be a vamp. He's left with a huge hickey (that's US slang for love bite) on his jugular, a longing for the red nectar, and the hots for a real beauty at his high school.

While he's after getting the girl — and vamping the high school bully — his deeply religious mother calls in the dippy local priest (Gulager), who decides to do an exorcism. Crucifixes don't work, of course, and it's only when Murphy convinces his girl to visit the local haunted house — a trip which includes a short course in child butchery — that we get any sight of the finale.

It all ends happily, of course, but en route this movie manages to feature some of the most boring vampires on celluloid. Murphy's moronic antics are meant to be humorous, but his brain

appears to be fighting a rear-guard action with intelligence. He does look like Arnie Cunningham in the Carpenter/King movie *Christine*, but there the resemblance ends. The film itself, on the other hand, attempts to mirror the B-movie mentality of the mid-Sixties (*I Was A Teenage Werewolf* et al), but it is so bland that it makes the video fast forward button look like a steak dinner. As a reviewer, I didn't have much choice but to leave the remote control alone, but as a punter you do have that choice.

John Gilbert



SINBAD OF THE SEVEN SEAS

Starring: Lou Ferrigno, John Steiner, Roland Wybenga, Enio Girolami, Haruhiko Yamanouchi, Teagan, Stefani Girolami
Director Enzo G Castellari
Distributor Pathe Video
Cert PG, 89 mins



Everyone should be happy, all should be well: the kindly Kailif's son, Prince Ali, is about to marry his love, the beautiful Alina. But Jaffar, the court vizier, has other ideas. He casts a spell to bring gloom and misfortune upon the previously happy kingdom, and draws the Kailif and the royal soldiers under his evil power. Worse still, Jaffar has kidnapped Alina and expelled Ali from the palace, cancelling the happy event.



It's not just her body Jaffar's after, though that's certainly on his mind: he holds her captive in a strange brain-washing machine, for if he can gain her will, he'll be able to destroy the five sacred gems that prevent him from gaining ultimate control of the kingdom. It'll take some time, so he scatters four of the gems to distant lands. But to the rescue comes hunky heroic Sinbad who, with his motley crew — the Prince, a midget, a Viking, a Samurai and a bald Greek — goes on a quest to recover the gems, encountering many hostile mon-

■ Too old by half? Lou Ferrigno as Sinbad

■ 'Eyes and teeth, darling': Teen Vamp

sters along the way.

Okay, so *Sinbad of the Seven Seas* is aimed at the kids, but that doesn't mean it can get away with being this cheap. An Italian production, most of the voices are dubbed into English, and that includes an almost incessant narration by a mother character who's telling the story to her daughter. The dialogue is so corny that children and adults alike will cringe, and the action is too slow and meandering to keep kids transfixed.

One of the few actors to speak with his own voice is the character with most appeal. As bad old Jaffar, John Steiner is so theatrical — his gesticulations wild, eyebrows animated — that whether you're meant to or not you can't fail to like him. He's pretty smart, too; in the Middle East of ancient times his domain is filled with a structure of highly refined metal and his brainwashing machine is made of plastic tubes and perspex manacles!

Sinbad, who *should* have been the audience's favourite character, is instead one of the worst. Lou Ferrigno is too muscular and too old for the part, and he hasn't even got the requisite beard. He also has to deliver the worst lines. As for his crew... Well the fact that a Viking and a Samurai are amongst them says it all. Their assailants, in a variety of cheap and utterly unconvincing costumes of plastic and rubber, are just as bad. Twice Sinbad faces the undead, and twice the effects are a wimp-out. All the tiresome monster battles here manage to avoid the Harryhausen-style stop-motion effects you'd expect from a Sinbad movie; every expense has been spared.

If you compare this movie with *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, a ripping yarn with pleasing effects that was produced way back in 1958, it puts the swashbuckler's latest endeavours into grim perspective.

Warren Lapworth

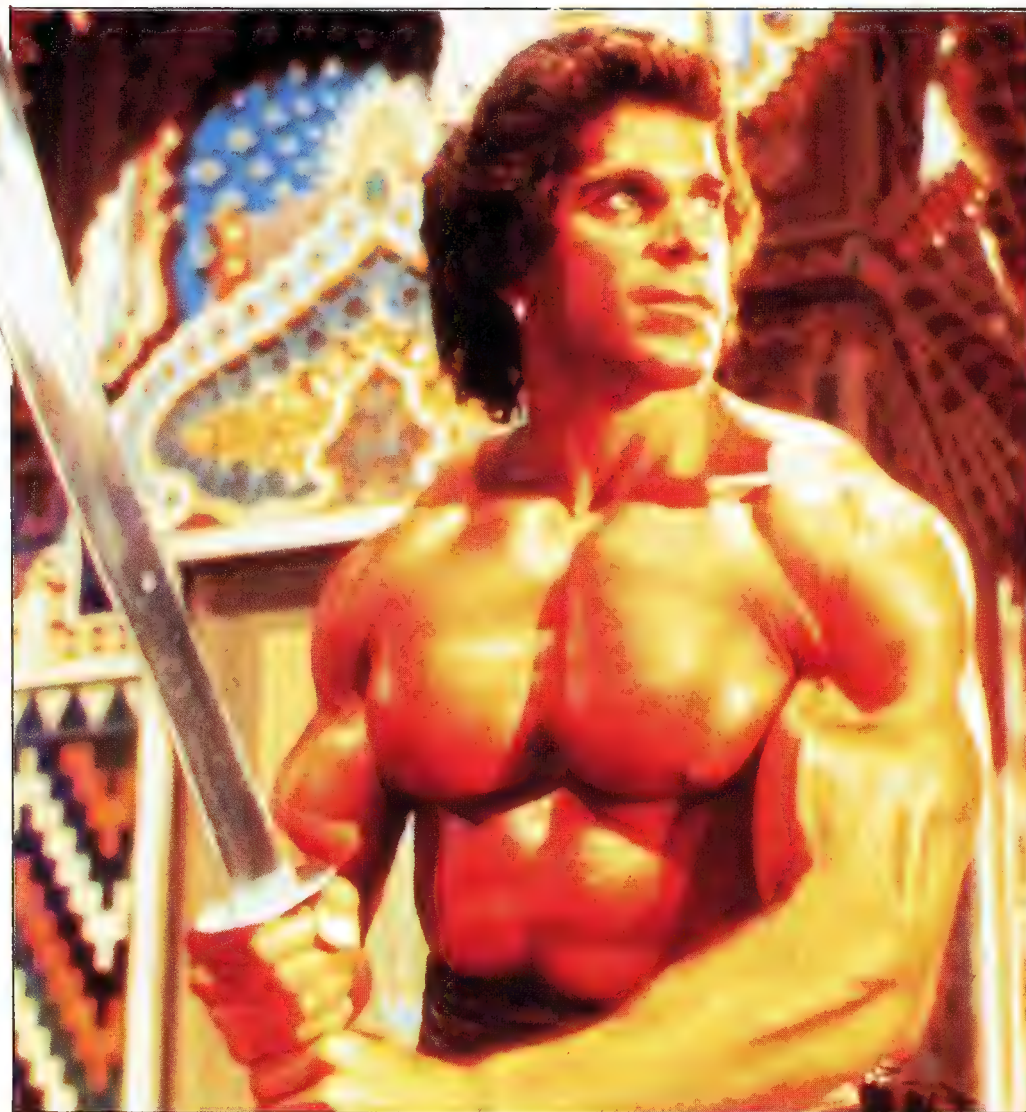


K9000

Starring: Catherine Oxenberg, Chris Mulkey
Director Kim Manners
Distributor Prism



What starts out as a regular tough cop movie ends up as a latterday Lassie story in this uneasy TV pilot format thriller. Chris Mulkey plays the cop, who doesn't get





■ Chris Mulkey and K9000

on well with any mechanical devices nor with his boss for that matter, and is given the job of investigating the murderous raid on a pharmaceutical company and the disappearance of top scientist, played by Catherine (Dynasty) Oxenberg.

Saved from being silenced permanently, the scientist teams up with the cop to rescue K9000, her pet project, a dog with a computer transplant. While saving the mechanised mutt from the clutches of the gang, the cop accidentally is injected with a voice transceiver, used to communicate with K9000, and hey presto, doggy Knight Rider is born and together they set about tracking down the criminals...

Perhaps more computer transplants would have saved this ill-balanced would-be entertainment, but between grown-ups, kids and K9000, let's hope it doesn't come to a series.

Franco Frey



NIGHT SHADOW

Starring: Brenda Vance, Dane Chan, Tom Boylan, Mike Hamilton, Kato Kaelin, Orien Richman, Alta La Flame, Jeanette Lewis
Director Randolph Cohan
Distributor BCB Distribution
Cert 18, 90 mins



Since the dawn of time, legend has told of a vicious man beast who kills under the influence of the full moon. *Night Shadow* chronicles the latest wave of attacks perpetrated by a werewolf, a savage beast whose name comes from the old English word 'were', meaning man and wolf.

Danford is a quiet mid American city to which TV reporter Alex Young (Brenda Vance) returns home for a well-earned rest. Along the road, however, she sees a strange man standing by an overheated car. She doesn't stop, but a kindly old gent does and offers him a lift. Later that day, the mutilated corpse of the old man is found in a garbage skip. It's not until two other corpses are found in the same condition that the police start to suspect a maniac is on the loose. But a pathology report states that

animal hair was found in the wounds of all the victims, so a big dog is now the chief suspect. Meanwhile Alex is reunited with old friends, not least Tyler her brother (played by Dane Chan), the stranger is spotted several times around the city and it appears that he has taken a room in the same hotel as Alex.

Alex's brother, along with a couple of friends, finds an old diary amongst the stranger's possessions; one of the friends decides to hang onto the book, and soon the boys discover that the werewolf is after them.

Night Shadow is a perfect example of how a movie shouldn't be made. I love the old werewolf movies of the 1940s and *An American Werewolf In London* is one of my all time favourite films, but essentially this film is let down by its slow pace. The director takes his time introducing the characters, and offers no explanation about why a werewolf has chosen to attack this sleepy city. Add to this an array of generally iffy acting and the fact that nothing is seen of wolffy until the last part of the film, and you have a very poor attempt at genre filmmaking indeed.

Mark Caswell



THE DIVE

Starring: Bjorn Sundquist, Frank Grimes, Eindrige Eidsvold, Michael Kitchen, Marika Lagerkrantz
Director Tristan De Vere Cole
Distributor Palace
Cert 15, 96 mins



Claustrophobia and the bends are everyday risks that deep sea divers have to handle but, despite the nature of the work, real accidents happen infrequently.

Rolf and Gunnar, however, are the unlucky ones. They agree to investigate the obstruction of a pipeline: at first, the two and their bosses believe it will be a simple bounce dive, sinking quickly to the troublespot, repairing the damage and bobbing back to the surface in under an hour. But, when their bell gets entangled in some netting, it ends up as a saturation dive, normally requiring two days of decompression.

The most experienced of the two divers, Rolf, has a rough ride. Pressure

builds up inside his head and his compatriot has to puncture his eardrum. Gunnar discovers that the bell's reserve gas tanks are empty and there are only two hours of air left in the tiny submerged compartment. A friend dives to secure a broken wynch-line and dies in the attempt.

These problems are not made easier when Gunnar's wife and children arrive at company headquarters, wondering

what has happened on this relatively simple mission. Tension mounts, time passes and you wonder if the company is ever going to get those brave boys



■ The Dive

out of trouble. There doesn't seem to be much they can do, but when you've got a breathtaking finale to accomplish, anything is possible.

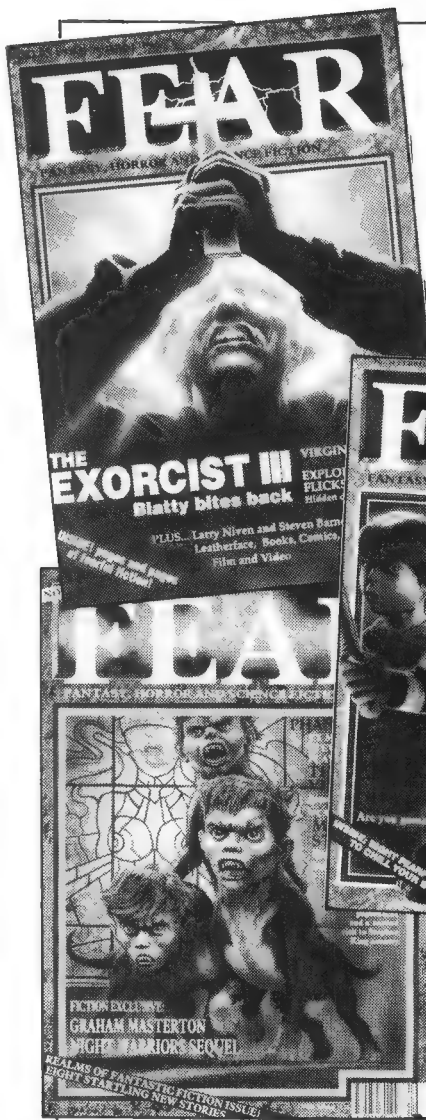
The Dive is more of a docu-drama than a trivial adventure set piece. You get the feeling that these people are genuine and what happens on celluloid could easily occur in real life. It's not a film for those who like the *Indiana Jones* style of action, but as a considered look at man against the elements, it's a winner.

John Gilbert



■ Night Shadow





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NIGHTWISH

Starring: Clayton Rohner, Alisha Das, Elizabeth Kaitan, Jack Starrett, Tom Dugan, Artur Cybulski
Director Bruce R Cook
Distributor Medusa
Cert 18, 86 mins



Dr Mendele is a parapsychologist, who appears slightly cracked from the very start of *Nightwish*. His research into dreams is aided by four young scientists who, in rather cheap-looking sense deprivation tanks, suffer horrifying nightmares so that Mendele may gain insights into the dark secrets of the mind.

In an attempt to force them to face their own death in dreams, the doctor takes them to a makeshift laboratory in a haunted house once owned by a miner, Lyton, in a valley filled with mysterious tales of UFOs and the supernatural. In their first attempt to make contact with Lyton, electronic equipment sets off a Polaroid camera as the temperature steadily drops, and a green, misty, snake-like apparition appears.

It's later discovered that the scientific equipment was rigged to spook-up... but the snake-like ectoplasm was genuine. Further seances reveal a darker nature to the clinical Dr Mendele, who was once forced to resign after his experiments caused two deaths.

Why the youngsters ever trusted Mendele enough to join his research team, let alone go to a ramshackle haunted house with him, is almost as baffling as why precious film was spent dragging *Nightwish* to the standard hour-and-a-half movie length. Mendele (Starrett) has mechanical, highly animated, almost chicken-like features,

■ Is it real, or is it *Nightwish*?

but speaks in deep drawl similar to a Carlsberg voiceover. If his creepy character doesn't scream 'mad professor', that of his assistant certainly does. Stanley (Tessier) is an archetypal Igor — Donald Pleasence on steroids.

The students also ham it up, with Kim (Das) and Donna (Kaitan) as the requisite bimbos. Brian Thompson as a standard lame-brained macho man rounds off a dry, flat team for the equally drab, outdated adventure. It's rather like an American, late-teens Famous Five (the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew?): with cheap dialogue, naive heroes, and high drama squeezed out of every scene.

I can't work out why *Nightwish* has an 18 certificate: there's no real gore, violence or brazen nudity (worse luck) to nudge it up to 'adults only', just an outdated storyline soldiering bravely on simply to earn itself an 'insomniacs only' tag.

Warren Lapworth



LOBSTER MAN FROM MARS

Starring: Tony Curtis, Deborah Foreman, Patrick Macnee, Billy Barty, Anthony Hickox
Director Stanley Sheff
Distributor Entertainment In Video
Cert PG, 78 mins



Hollywood has an uncanny way of reinventing itself and, as Blake Edwards noted so accurately in *SOB*, it's always easier to rehash an old idea than come up with a new one. So it is perhaps inevitable that the dreadful science fiction films of the Fifties (*Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes*, *Plan 9 From Outer Space*) should reemerge in *Lobster Man From Mars*, a



■ Deborah Foreman and Anthony Hickox discover the perils of eating North Sea shellfish in *Lobster Man From Mars*

tedious *hommage* to trash.

If one presupposes that a film about a genre of awful films must, by definition, itself be awful, then perhaps the existence of *Lobster Man* makes some kind of sense. Tony Curtis obviously thought it did, because he puts in an appearance as Shelldrake, a movie producer who must make a flop, for tax reasons, if he is to survive in the biz. He therefore hauls in for interview a young man who has just completed his first home movie, which is... Aaargh, no! You get the picture?

The real joke is — and this is really great, folks — that we are subjected to almost 70 minutes of a preview screening of this excruciating film within a film which, of course, has all the trash elements one would expect — wobbly scenery, dire script, hopeless acting, unconvincing aliens etc etc — and is, therefore, supposed to be riotously funny.

Well, it isn't. It's boring — very. I don't know, what will they think of next? Giving director Stanley Sheff a brain transplant, perhaps.

Patience Coster



SIGHT UNSEEN

Starring: Wings Hauser

Director Greydon Clark

Distributor BCB

Cert 18



Since witnessing the horrific murder of her boyfriend and daughter by a masked man from whom she herself narrowly escaped, Alice Lundgren is haunted by visions which tell her that her little girl is still alive. Discharging herself from psychiatric hospital, she returns home to her billionaire husband (Wings Hauser), whom she is in the process of divorcing, determined to find her child Tracy and to track down the insane elevator killer who wrecked their lives. But her hallucinations persist, and Alice begins to fear for her own sanity. Is she going mad, or is someone trying to drive her crazy?



■ Impaired vision: Susan Blakely in *Sight Unseen*

As a series of totally predictable events unfolds, the main purpose of this movie seems to be to let you know that the filmmakers have seen all the right films (by Hitchcock and De Palma most notably) but have learnt absolutely nothing in the process. A repetitive, clumsily directed and badly scripted thriller, *Sight Unseen* holds back its one good card until the last three minutes, by which point you'll probably have switched off anyway.

Patience Coster



STUDY IN MADNESS

APARTMENT ZERO

Starring: Colin Firth, Hart Bochner, Dora Bryan, Liz Smith

Director Martin Donovan

Distributor 20/20 Vision

Cert 18, 92 mins



Lonely cinema manager Adrian Leduc (Firth) advertises for someone to share his flat, Apartment Zero, situated in downtown Buenos Aires. The respondents are crass, uninteresting or irritating — like the couple of old crows, played by Bryan and Smith, who live in the building with him — and he's almost given up when the doorbell rings and Jack Carney (Bochner) appears.

Leduc is instantly drawn to the young, handsome Carney, and homosexual overtones are implicit as their relationship develops. Both have secrets. Leduc has a mother suffering from chronic senile dementia who he has locked in a nursing home; she's dying, he knows it, and he will do anything not to be left alone. Carney is an ex-American army agent who has been sent to Argentina to kill insurgents. His job is done, but he's trapped in corned beef country and begins to kill and mutilate men and women just for the fun of it.

Carney's landlord unearths some photographs of him in army fatigues, and one of Leduc's employees is horribly mutilated at the flat when she discovers Carney's identity. Both men then start to share an existence in which death, torture and the disposal of bodies are routine.

The finale of this tense, manipulative movie is downbeat but full of dread. Leduc is turned inside out emotionally, and we learn that only in the dark can you see his real face. While the movie is obvi-



ously a low budget thriller, director Martin Donovan has used all his resources to the utmost to create a brilliant, understated study of two kinds of madness.

John Gilbert



AN END TO THE LIVING...

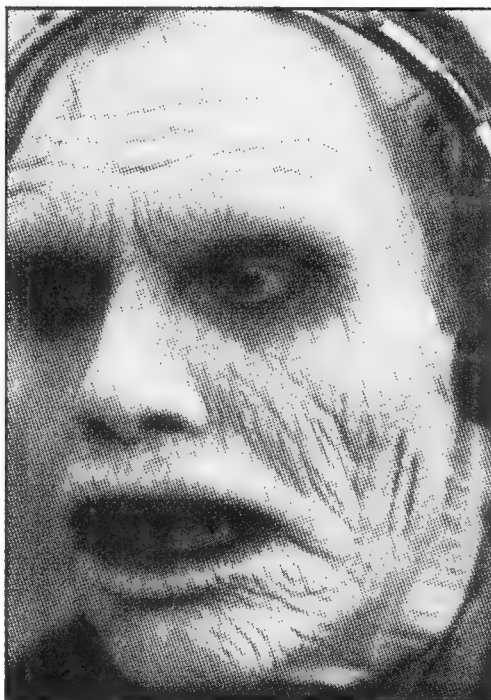
DAY OF THE DEAD

Starring: Lori Cardille, Terry Alexander, Joe Pilato
Director George A Romero
Distributor Entertainment in Video
Cert 18, 100 mins, £9.99



This last in the trilogy that started way back in the late 60s with *Night of the Living Dead* kicks off with the newspaper headline THE DEAD WALK! And they do. The world is overrun by them, and a puny 12 humans are desperate to stay alive in an underground missile silo. The scientific team is at loggerheads with the military, whose increasing hysteria spews forth in a torrent of verbal gross indecency which by the end of the film just about puts them on a par with the gibbering zombies they're threatened by.

Terminate the walking dead permanently, or control and domesticate them in a semi-racist experiment in sub-human slave creation? Could the mess be unavoidable divine retribution for human presumption and its threat of nuclear armageddon symbolised so ably by the silo which holds the survivors? Perhaps, Romero's preoccupation with decaying flesh outside and decaying morals inside the silo puts the philosophy on hold in favour of aggression all round. The walking dead don't discuss a lot, but then, neither do the survivors, and the gross action turns any arguments into mere expletives.



■ Cuddly Bub the zombie bops to his Walkman, while below other zombies rampage through the missile silo



It's perhaps telling that the nicest character in the movie is Bub (Howard Sherman), an experimental zombie in the quasi-technical machinations of mad scientist Logan (Richard Liberty in lip-smacking pedantic form), who gets the audience's thumbs up at the end for despatching the crazed Captain Rhodes (Joe Pilato) in suitably apocalyptic style.

The real question is whether George A Romero's nightmare vision has satisfactorily lasted through three films over such a period of time. In this reviewer's opinion, the answer is not quite. Yet

there's no denying the almost mesmeric power of his relentless and unrelenting gloominess. Only the music — curiously unsuited to the pace — attempts to relieve the atmosphere, despite its repetitiousness. Romero's strength is in his visuals, which usually manage to be horrifically beautiful, rather than the scope of imagination or plot, and because of this *Day of the Dead* rises well above the common and graveyard horror flick.

Roger Kean



HELLRAISER

Starring: Andrew Robinson, Clare Higgins
Director Clive Barker
Distributor New World Video,
Cert 18, 90 mins, £9.99



The movie which pinned down great horror to the British Isles and proved Clive Barker a good director as well as author. No need for plot analysis, FEAR readers will know it



■ Pinhead from Hellraiser

all. Just remember the tension, the (not overdone) horror! Christopher Young's music lavishes Hollywood big budget feel on what was really shoe-string artistry and clinches 'classic' status. Buy it.

Oliver Frey



CHERRY 2000

Starring: Melanie Griffith, David Andrews, Ben Johnson, Tim Thomerson
Director Jacques Haitkin
Distributor RCA/Columbia Pictures
Cert 15, 95 mins



They don't make them like they used to, not even in 1917...

When romance and attachment has to be won by tough commercial bartering in the local nightclub, Sam Treadwell (David Andrews) can rely on his well-built and sweet-mannered manmade android playmate Cherry 2000 for eternal bliss, that is until dishwasher suds put a sudden electric end to good, solid home entertainment.

The search for spare parts for such a defunct classic proves to be a major adventure into the lawless zone 7 under the guidance of smooth moving, husky voiced tracker E Johnson (Melanie Griffith), a working girl with a difference. All is not silicon, as the two partners enter the barbaric wasteland, do battle with the local commune of killer psychopaths and find their way to the sand-logged ghost-town of Las Vegas, which provides the setting for Cherry 2000 spares and the end of Sam Treadwell's search for perfect



■ Melanie Griffith in *Cherry 2000*

companionship.

Cherry 2000 may not be a masterpiece of filmmaking, but it has all the hallmarks of becoming a low budget cult classic, thanks to Griffith's subsequent fame, Ben Johnson's excellent supporting performance and Michael Almereyda's witty screenplay. **Franco Frey**



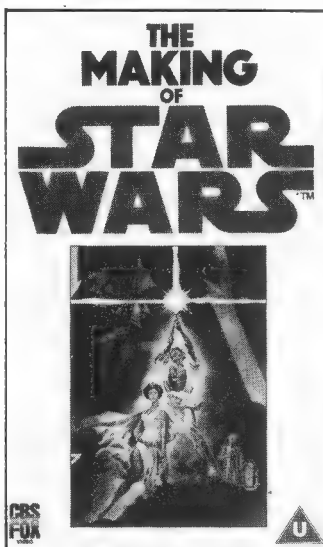
THE MAKING OF STAR WARS FROM STAR WARS TO JEDI CLASSIC CREATURES: RETURN OF THE JEDI

Distributor CBS/FOX
Cert U, each 48 mins, each £9.99



Three videos, originally obviously produced to coincide with the movies' releases, on the making of our fave science fiction epic. Hear what motivated George Lucas, see storyboards, marvel at the special effects, watch the filming and enjoy the clips. The movies' stars put in appearances and comment on various aspects.

The videos are uniquely American in style and sometimes verge perilously



close to self-congratulatory condescension, but in the end do deliver the goods, albeit uncritically. Any fan with the money to spare will want to have them, if only to whet the appetite for the long rumoured new epic to come. **Oliver Frey**



■ Princess Leia in the clutches of Jabba The Hutt, a classic creature



BOOKS

SKULL RATINGS

Not to be missed



Recommended



Fair



Poor



Diabolical



HORROR

The Blood Of Roses
The Fire Worm
The Frighteners
Goat Dance
Silent Moon
Sunglasses After Dark



SCIENCE FICTION

The Cyborg And The Sorcerers
Earth
The Empire Of Fear
Gorgon Child
Mindsail
Nightfall



FANTASY

Castle In The Air
Death Gate Cycle 1
Pyramids



THRILLER

American Blood
Blood Wings
In A Dark Dream



ART

Blood And Iron
The Dan Dare Dossier
Ratspike



PYRAMIDS

Author **Terry Pratchett**
Publisher **Corgi**
Format **PB, £3.50**



Terry Pratchett: come to the front of the class! You're flooding the fantasy market with your gigglesome gems and everyone's rolling around on the floor laughing. Not

that I mind, but it's difficult to get much work done when you're only halfway through the latest Pratchett offering, especially when it's set back on Discworld.

This one features Teppic, whose major role in life is to be put upon. First, there's the ignominy of being trained by the Assassins Guild in Ankh-Morpork. It doesn't exactly give you the right sort of reputation when, at the drop of an untimely hat, you're offered the throne of Djelibeybi (if you haven't come across it yet, it's a desert kingdom). Suddenly, Teppic's secure life, dealing in death, is shattered and he's got to come to terms with being an all-powerful ruler with lots of enemies (maybe that Assassins training will come in handy before the end of the book, after all).

Without exception, Pratchett's comedic novels have led the field of humorous fantasy; actually, it's difficult to deny that he created this particular watering hole of the fantastique. There's not much more I can say about Pratchett. He's up there in the gods of fantasy writing — and he probably knows it.

John Gilbert

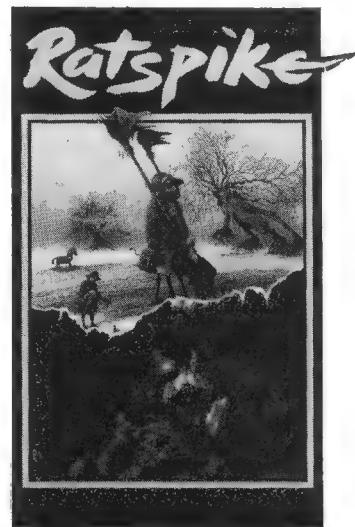


RATSPIKE

John Blanche, Ian Miller
Publisher **Games Workshop**
Format **HB £12.99**



The two artists who share this book are of a post punk hippy attitude to life. They're obviously friends, and their work reflects the similarity of concern. Both stuff their creations with gotho-scurrilous detail which in John's case often defeats the grand effect. Both are prey to their own sense of humour, great to same-wave-length aficionados, but faintly and irritatingly tedious to others.



Talent is there, however, and a prolific output. Visions of worlds gone mad, peopled freaks and medieval Bosch-like beings who often seem to grow from the very nature that harbours them.

Difficult to judge between them, my own feeling goes out to Ian Miller for more often succeeding to create a memorable image.

The book is jam-packed, perhaps too much so, but well worth a browse.

Oliver Frey



MEAT FOR DEBATE

MINDSAIL

Author Anne Gay
Publisher Orbit
Format HB, £12.95



As the green revolution rolls on unabated and equality appears to be the password of the Nineties, several science fiction writers have taken up the challenge to see what effects such rapid changes could have on individuals.

One of the most striking examples of this sub-genre is *Mindsail*, a first novel by Anne Gay. She does away with the possibility of insulting one group or other in the debate by basing her story on the planet Rosaria where, long ago, a starship crashed. The survivors and their descendants split into warring groups, one of which is the Green, and the other the Red.

The heroine, Tohalla, lives amongst the idyllic Greens with their society based upon the adoration and use — not abuse — of nature. Here a strict moral code applies. Members of this group must not, for instance, use personal pronouns to address one another. Rather, new forms of address, such as 'a body' instead of 'I', have been perfected.

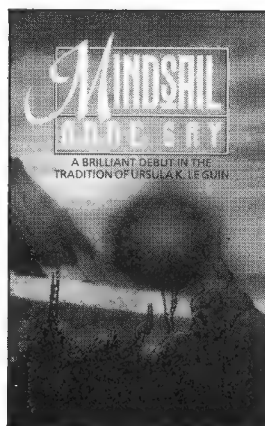
On the other side of this apparent garden of Eden, lies the Red society, bent on aggression and bloody murder. Greens have always believed that meat is the Reds' totem and that they are little better than ignorant mongrels, intent on destruction.

All this infighting sounds familiar when related to our own Earthly plight, but Gay dares to put one group, or extreme, against the other, test the emotional response and deliver a surprisingly damning verdict.

Two Red men are captured by the Greens at a time when Tollaha is being pushed into making a marriage of convenience. She meets these men and learns that they are not the barbaric heathens that she was led to expect. Eventually, the strictures of her own Green group force her to reappraise her existence, and she finds it dull, restrictive and pointless. Her path is clear, she must leave her safe, Green haven.

Gay's interesting first novel hoists some interesting questions into our own green debate. Is complete abstinence from the meats of life equal to wallowing in blood and sewage? She certainly makes a good case that one extreme is as bad as the other. Unfortunately, her novel doesn't provide a simple answer, but I hope it provides meat for debate.

John Gilbert



strip's death and re-birth, the complete index of episodes (including Radio Luxemburg serials), the (then) giant merchandising business! Read story reprints from Annuals, Specials and National Dailies!

Exclamation marks are in order: the publishers have lavished attention to detail and excellence of colour reproduction on what is clearly a work of love and well worth the price.

Sad footnote: *Eagle* recently returned to the original Dan Dare and commissioned veteran Keith Watson to draw the story reprinted in the book. Since publication, *Eagle* has relaunched — and Dan has been re-jigged to 'suit' the times. Result: 90s mediocre pap... Oliver Frey

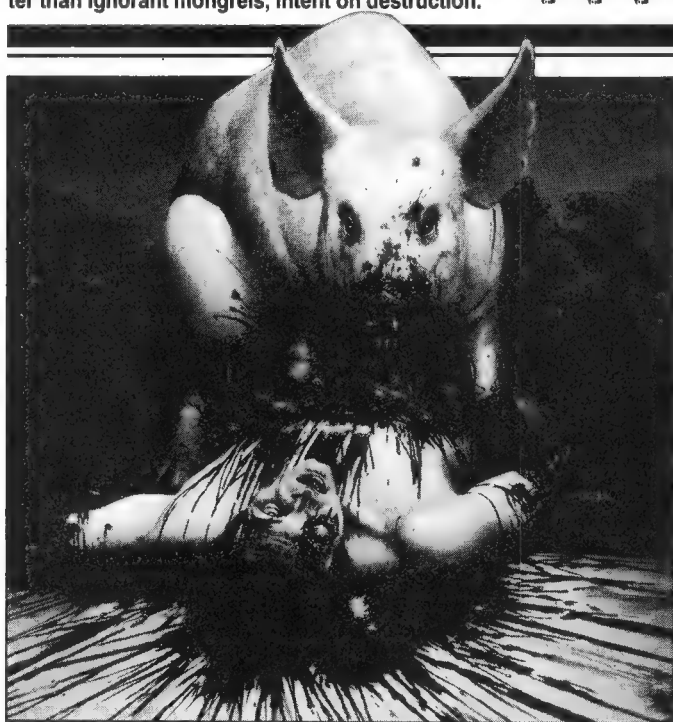
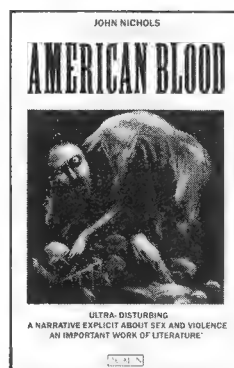


AMERICAN BLOOD

Author John Nichols
Publisher Paladin
Format PB, £4.99



John Nichols begins this novel with his central character, Michael Smith, knee-deep in such Vietnamese gore that one wonders whether the author is sick, or whether it's merely life. The incident where a truckload of dead Vietnamese are dropped on a village is one of the milder moments. Disbelief is held at bay by a sowing of the whole text with military lingo, the dry military names — M-16 to 155 — and slang. A first-person narrative is profane and informal, the authentic voice of a young, traumatised Vietnam vet.



BLOOD AND IRON

Les Edwards
Publisher Games Workshop
Format HB £12.99

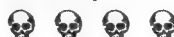


Art books on illustrators in the genre tend to focus on fantasy and science fiction, sweeping, elevating, beautiful and imaginative.

Lurid horror barely gets a look in. And yet, many able illustrators earn their living painting striking covers for books of the night, full of intentionally vile imagery. Les Edwards is a talented, and cheerfully unpretentious, exponent of the latter. While not eschewing science fiction and fantasy, his powers positively darken when bloody, twisted dread is the subject.

Deceptively free of technical wizardry, and quite photographic in treatment and colour, his horror paintings make you squirm with the alarmingly bland depiction of the most gruesome abominations invented: it's as if you met them in the privacy of your home!

Despite all this — what a cheerful chap Les is... Oliver Frey



THE DAN DARE DOSSIER

Text Norman Wright
Editor Mike Higgs
Publisher Hawk Books
Format HB £14.95



Eagle — the self-styled national strip cartoon weekly — was born in April 40 years ago and changed the face of British youth magazines. Its main hero, Dan Dare, piloted his strip into the annals of science fiction fame. Never had Blighty seen the likes of what his creator Frank Hampson and team served up in the way of hi-tech space adventure. This book aims to provide the complete background to the Pilot of the Future's world, to accompany Hawk Books' ongoing series of Dan Dare reprints (see review in FEAR 17).

Read all about it, marvel at the wealth of illustrations! How Dan was 'born', his team, his adversaries, the hardware, the writers, the artists, the changes, the

Once back in 'the world', Smith is predictably unable to shake off the ghoulish memories of his time 'in country'. His mind is that of a typical, shy and somewhat melodramatic young man, carried to extremes by his Vietnam experience. He avoids going out with women for fear they might be appalled by his dark thoughts and memories, or that he might again be consumed by the killing rage. For a time he resembles Travis Bickle in Martin Scorsese's film *Taxi Driver*, he keeps loneliness and sexual tension at bay with rigorous work-outs at the shooting range. He collects newspaper stories filled with violent ugliness that seems transplanted from Vietnam. In time he meets a woman who might offer redemption. But that is by no means the end of things.

The story is, ultimately, a very moral tale, delving deep into the sex-and-violence of Michael's disturbed mind early on, graphic horror which is then interwoven with a broader indictment of the Vietnam War and American society itself. Later on we begin to explore consequences, the victim's perspective. There is no simplicity in this though, for even the killers are victims to a limited

extent. While the unfortunate excitement of violent imagery in sex is ameliorated, eventually, by a girlfriend, it then regains its horror through subsequent events. Nichols peppers his story with silly ad lines and optimistic homilies which, combined with convincing characterisation, offer some very ironic hope. But there is no intellectual understanding of the horrors of life, the Charlie Mansons and Peter Sutcliffes, especially as the sometime angel of this novel — Smith — often seems potentially to be one of them.

Although there are no supernatural events here, this is a sort of horror novel. It includes many horrific scenes and, like Hutson's work, rarely flinches from detail. At its centre is the 'evil that men do' (and dream of), but Nichols deals with it convincingly and intelligently. At times he threatens to go over the top with rawness, off-hand violence and dark sarcasm, but by the end *Blood* has become a convincing and memorable exploration of evil. It is definitely an adult novel, explicit and literary in its ambitions. For a real rollercoaster ride through a kind of hell, this is both convincing and thoughtful. Once again avoid the back-of-the-book if you don't want to know about the shocking plot twists. All in all, unmissable for readers already deep in the mire of explicit horror but more problematic for those expecting any kind of reserve on the part of the author.

Stuart Wynne



EARTH

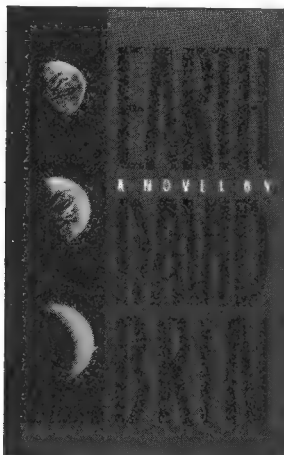
Author David Brin
Publisher Macdonald Format
HB, £13.95



The Postman, David Brin's most famous work — soon to be a film — focuses on a harsh, apocalyptic Earth, his new novel deals with the realistic, and therefore very frightening, reverse side of the same coin: the run-up to an A-day.

In line with much scientific thought, Brin sees natural disaster as the most likely force behind the catastrophe and expounds a unusual, ruthless, though logically concrete way of ensuring the continued survival of the planet.

The story begins fifty years from now, as scientists discover that a black hole has taken up residence at the Earth's core. As they dig deeper into the facts surrounding the accident they discover that another hole is already feeding on the planet and will destroy it within two years. The international scientific establishment tries to find an answer to



this disaster-in-waiting while other, more political, voices urge the extinction of the human race in order to save Earth.

As the debate heats up and the research grows more frantic, Brin expands his narrative into space, and vividly depicts attempts at conservation on several frontiers, showing that the effects of our decisions — as the most intelligent species on Earth — will not necessarily be confined to the human race or its immediate environs.

Though not necessarily, or simply, a 'green' novel, Brin's book is speculative fiction at its best in a genre that is rapidly becoming the conscience of humanity.

John Gilbert



THE BLOOD OF ROSES

Author Tanith Lee
Publisher Legend
Format HB, £13.95



A cyclic myth told in Tanith Lee's sensuously medieval style, this massive tome depicts the history of a breakaway group of clerics who take to supping on the blood of young men.

Vampires, you might exclaim, but Lee rarely uses this generic term in her weighty text. The book is overlong, and the many, intertwining subplots are apt to ramble. First we are introduced to Mechail Korhien, terribly deformed son of a forest lord, and then, confusingly, to the real major character, Anjelin, an honest-to-god-fearing vampire who holds the rest of the book's characters in his merciless grip.

He is also the major historical backdrop to the whole tale, as he appears to have created each of its participants with almost godlike manipulations. In a way Anjelin is a god, having undergone crucifixion on a sacred tree within the forest. Cut down before death, he acquires terrifying powers and appetites during his formative years.

Anjelin joins the church of Christus which, in a way he began as the sacred god upon the tree. He manipulates its brotherhood, quickly rising in the ranks and taking control of the local order. His quest for control urges him to manipulate blood lines, create his 'children' from the political alliances, and wombs, of others, whilst ensuring that he obtains and retains control over the Christus religion.

Unfortunately, one pawn in the game, a dispensable woman who he forced to have his 'child' through the medium of a man she did not love, does not die as he wishes, and seeks a bloody revenge: nothing less than the destruction of everything he has corruptly created. She succeeds and forces the other 'children' of Anjelin to step out of his shadow and find their own, new lives.

The Blood Of Roses is a long, complex read, ironically paganising Christian dogma, showing in subtle terms that the act of communion is, at its base level, an act of cannibalism. As such, the novel is a powerful indictment of corruption within religion, an object lesson in cultism, and a heady romp into the realms of vampirism.

It is also, for those who prefer their fantasy straightforward and simple, overly rich in words and twisted with flashback and revelation which is often difficult to understand. Nothing, however, can detract from the passion that this book evokes and, in that alone,

it is a pleasurable pastime.

John Gilbert



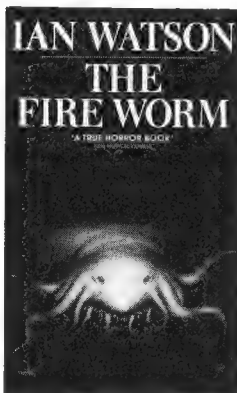
THE FIRE WORM

Author Ian Watson
Publisher Grafton
Format PB, £3.50



Back in 1986, Ian Watson wrote an excellent short story about a young schoolboy being seduced into a horrible fate in Jingly Georgie's Hole. Although obviously rich in symbolism, the scene where the schoolboy both chases and is chased by penis-like monsters makes this clear, the author made little attempt to interpret it for the reader. This was true horror, clever but still raw and red in tooth and claw.

The Fire Worm takes the short story and turns it into something recounted by a psychiatric patient. Chopping up the short story with interpretation and supposition is John Cunningham, whose unique treatment rests on convincing people they have lived in past lives, and regressing them into these in search of the source of their current mental problems. John doesn't believe in reincarnation, only that it's a harmless enough belief to engender in his patients as a cure. Unfortunately, John himself could do with no little treatment, as his alter ego — Jack Cannon, horror writer — has split him into a true schizoid, with John having long mental conversations with Jack.



John/Jack aren't really that interesting to begin with though, and their interpretation of the short story dulls its impact. Only as the book progresses, with the patient being regressed into ever more distant lives, does the novel pick up pace. Moreover, the setting for the novel is the near-future which allows Watson to embroider Cunningham's present with echoes of the mental nightmare. AIDS is the most obvious source of current sexual unease, and Watson manages to mention it on practically every other page. In fact, his gloominess is so over the top that it soon begins to cheer the reader up.

There are some nice touches however, a casual observation on the disappearance of sex from advertising, leads to 'creative attempts to evolve a new iconography of polymorphous-perverse fetishism... sex-robots... [which] would not necessarily resemble the human form too closely, provided that certain curves and openings and protrusions were coded-in satisfyingly.' The sophistication of the language almost makes it believable, but such English reserve elsewhere is irritating. Watson never really opens his shoulders and hits at his subject with true

confidence. The past-life fantasies and the real-life schizophrenia overlap and propel the book onwards without it ever really become wholly gripping. None of the characters are all that engaging, and the symbolism isn't executed with quite enough flair to be compelling. Nevertheless, this is an ambitious and intelligent book which has collected some good reviews off mainstream publications. The various interpretations of the monstrous fire worm towards the end certainly have an impact. So if you want some intellectual gristle to go with the odd splatter of blood, this is well worth a look.

Stuart Wynne



CASTLE IN THE AIR

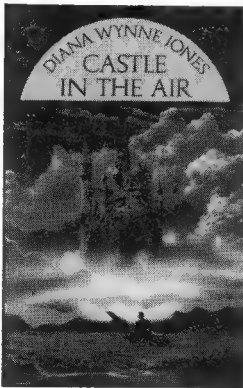
Author Dianne Wynne-Jones
Publisher Methuen
Format HB, £8.95



This extravagant and amusing sequel to *How's Moving Castle* is full of high-spirited adventure, romance, bandits, hideous monsters and genies. I confess to not having read the first book, but this sequel stands up perfectly well on its own. For instance, the character of Sophie from *How's Moving Castle* does appear in *Castle In The Air*, and the plots seem cleverly entwined, but this should not confuse first time readers.

Wonderfully contrived and imaginative scenes emphasise the author's energy and gifts as a storyteller. Abdullah, the central character, charms the reader with his increasingly realistic daydreams which provide an unlimited fund of ideas. Add to this the magic carpet, a beautiful daughter of a fierce and protective Sultan, the Castle in the Air, and you have the ingredients of a fabulous tale.

This is not a book which people of my age would normally choose to read, but admittedly Wynne-Jones does have uncanny skills (eg. her ability to create creditable and amusing characters and comparing their responses to utterly fantastic situations). Abdullah is a



likeable and touching creation; he is not necessarily heroic, which I found part of his appeal, and he is not too much of a rogue to put children off.

The narrative is certainly detailed (often unnecessarily so, as the reader's attention is frequently diverted, but I suspect Wynne-Jones' readership has become used to this). The plot thrives on Abdullah's incredible imagination, and the unpredictable nature of the book is just what children love. What is more, the characters have a sort of childish manner and intimacy in their reactions to the ugly, adult foe, and this is something that children can easily



identify with.

To parents, if you want your children to enjoy good-humoured, intelligent and tasteful adventure writing, this is a must. To children, if you want a read with laughs, thrills, spills and much more... get it!

Benjamin Dowell, aged 16



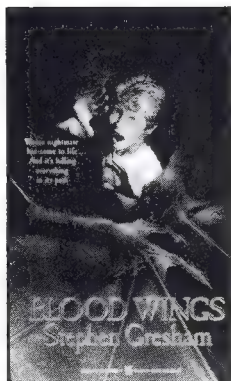
BLOOD WINGS

Author Stephen Gresham
Publisher Zebra
Format PB, £2.95



Another case of nice cover, shame about the book, Stephen Gresham's *Blood Wings* stars Anita Martin, a young mother who decides to start over and take her sons, Wade and Timmy to a quiet resort on the edge of the everglades.

Everything seems peachy until Wade starts to have nightmares featuring a manbat with 'black silken wings'. You



know something's wrong when his dreams become reality. Tourists start to disappear as the creature surfaces from the murky swamp, snatching at any human prey it can find. Wade believes that he is the only one who knows about the beast, but he's wrong, and a saviour appears from a most unusual direction.

Where do I start with this tripe? The plot is formulaic, the characterisation

and visualisation unimpressive, and the creature unimpressive. The writer struggles valiantly to raise it above your average child in peril thriller, and fails miserably.

John Gilbert



SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK

Author Nancy A Collins
Publisher Futura
Format PB, £3.50



Vampires are in the blood of most horror fans. There's something intimately sensual about those fangs, the pale skin and the fierce red eyes and lips, something primal about all that bloodbeating lust.

American authoress Nancy A Collins has used all that, and the gathering momentum of a vampire resurgence, in her latest novel. Like *Dracula*, it has taken some time to cross the sea to



Britain, but now it's here, horror fans should waste no time in getting to grips with her 'erotic dreams' and 'bloodsoaked nightmares'.

Sonja Blue is the vampire in question. A former prostitute, she was bitten by a trick one dark night and hasn't been the same since. At first she got into the minds of her innocent victims, drew them to her, drained their blood, and revelled in the heat of her existence.

Now, though, she's had time to think; time to realise that vampirism is a curse, something to be stamped out. Sonja starts a bloody crusade, hunting down and gutting any night dwellers she finds. She remains a night hunter, but her victims become her dark colleagues, be they bloodsuckers or others, such as werewolves or ghouls. Soon she becomes the undead's worst enemy and they must escape from her or destroy her.

Collins' novel puts me in mind of Skipp and Spector's *Light At The End* and, in some respects, Anne Rice's *Queen Of The Damned*. It has a youthful, eternal fire about it which is difficult to put out once you start to read. And, of course, it's destined to be a classic in Britain just as it has become in the States.

John Gilbert



THE CYBORG AND THE SORCERORS

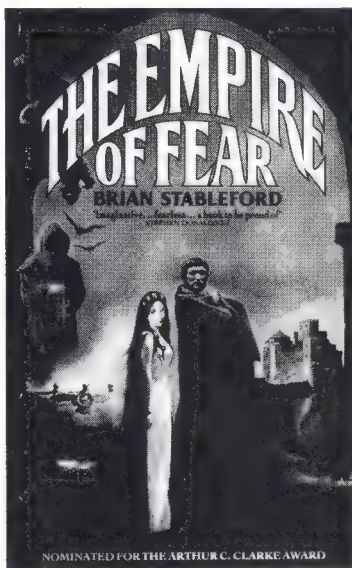
Author Lawrence Watt-Evans
Publisher Grafton
Format PB, £3.99



Lawrence Watt-Evans is a Hugo-award winning author, currently up to book four in his *The Lords of Dus* series. His latest British publication is *The Cyborg And The Sorcerors*, but the copyright dates back to 1982 and the book reads very much like a first novel. Both plotting and characterisation are a little shaky, the science is weak and many good ideas are never fully exploited.

The story is set in the aftermath of a far-future war between Earth and her colonies. Slant, the cyborg, is pilot of a starship hopping from system to system, spying and destroying enemy weapons. With the war over he'd like to surrender, but the ship's computer hasn't been programmed for that and not only can it detonate an explosive charge in Slant's skull, but it can also take direct control of his body at any time.

Their latest mission takes place on a planet which has already suffered a heavy nuclear bombardment. Civilisation has been bombed back into medieval times, complete with plenty of magicians. But due to nuclear radiation,



THE EMPIRE OF FEAR

Author Brian Stableford
Publisher Pan Fantasy
Format Large format paperback, £7.99



Empire begins with the world under the dominion of vampires, immortals who command through fear. They are the aristocracy and royalty in a beautifully detailed depiction of 17th century England. Although the Pope supports their rule — being one of them — there are some commoners who believe their rule is less than just. Noell Cordery is one such, soon caught up in a glorious adventure including a massive sea battle, mysterious African rites and riveting personal duels. But this is by no means the whole of the book, which boasts an impressive display of thought and nicely observed human passion.

Unlike so many brain-dead potboilers, *Empire* abandons simplistic, Manichean notions of absolute good and evil for a richer, more realistic tapestry with many shades of grey. So much so that even *Dracula* (the historical inspiration for *Dracula* and here the most fearsome and blood-thirsty of the vampires) is in some ways sympathetic. His bravery is impressive and buttressed by a genuine concern for his troops. When he argues for a horrendous massacre, the reader is swayed by his conviction that this will set the world to rights, bringing lasting peace. But then someone else speaks of the need for justice and honour in dominion, so we gratefully draw away from his evil.

This is a book of pyrotechnic speeches and thoughtful men as much as war. Underpinning it all is a rich appreciation of human worth and diversity, an intelligence which sees the parallels between the vampires' cruel empire and that of their sometime ally, death. There are characters and observations here which live on after the book finishes. For once the reader is respected, not patronised,

with one of Cordery's most poignant speeches being subtly echoed in the epilogue.

Of course the plot is immense, taking us half way around the world in the company of the self-doubting hero Cordery, whose scientific endeavours grip like a detective story. But Stableford often slips into the minds of other, more warlike characters where necessary, for plot and dramatic scenes. This 520-page epic is not without some slow passages, but it is always compelling and compulsively readable. Ignore the back-of-the-book blurb, outlining the geography of the plot up until virtually the end, and enjoy some masterful story-telling.

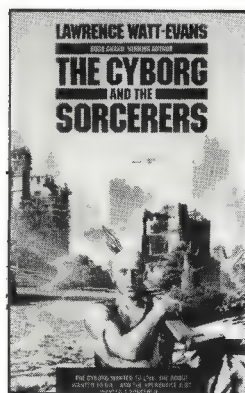
Stuart Wynne



psi powers have been boosted, and magic does indeed work with flying magicians, mind-reading and dead lizards revived with incantations.

The driving force of the novel comes from the conflict between the cyborg's compassion for the natives, and the computer's desire to get what it wants at all costs. This central conflict has plenty of potential, but Slant's lack of remorse when half a city is levelled endangers the reader's sympathy. Some repetition in the plot further weakens interest, but there's always The Girl to look forward to. Being a homicidal loner, Slant has to encounter one. Appropriately named Ahnao, she meets Slant when he's lasering her uncle's head off for the ship to examine. She's an inevitably reluctant hostage, but once freed she desperately chases after him. She's become his possession you see, an odd aspect of a culture otherwise notable for its civilisation. You might expect her to be bitter about this, but no, she's soon whinging because he's not consumed with passionate love for her. Weirder things have happened, I suppose, but it needs a lot of explanation — notable by its absence here.

Lack of convincing characterisation is the main flaw in the book, so that by the



end one rather wishes Slant would have his own head blown up. The plot is rather loose for the thriller-type format, but the cyborg/computer conflict never completely loses its tension. A more experienced writer could have made this a real hit, maybe Watt-Evans himself could now. But as it is this is a disappointing novel, which might have been acceptable adolescent thriller fodder were it not for the lamentable Ahnao whose scenes suggest self-parody, and destroy all credibility.

Stuart Wynne



THE FRIGHTENERS

Author Stephen Laws
Publisher Souvenir
Format HB, £14.95



Gang warfare takes on a new intensity in Stephen Laws' latest supernatural suspense story. Eddie Brinkburn is a car mechanic and petty criminal. Drawn into the world of modern crime by the shadowy figure of Sheraton, he is captured and imprisoned with his black friend Rennie after the job for which he's acting as getaway driver goes wrong.

All he wants to do is forget the past, serve his time in prison and go back to his wife and kids, but Sheraton's brother was badly injured in the botched robbery and the crime boss blames Brinkburn. In revenge, Eddie's family is burned in their home and he is targeted for the same treatment in prison.

WORLD IN PERIL

THE DEATH GATE CYCLE 1: DRAGON WING

Authors Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman
Publisher Bantam Press
Format HB, £11.95



Dragonlance authors Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman leave the often clichéd world of role-playing support behind and advance the concept of shared world books.

The seven volumes of the Death Gate Cycle take several worlds and characters and gradually bring them together. The first four novels are set in vastly different elemental worlds — of sky, stone, fire and sea — with self contained sets of characters: during the remaining three, the characters encounter the Death Gate, pass through it, and adventure in each others' territories.

Dragon Wing takes on Arianus, Realm Of Air, where a continuing battle for water takes place amongst the elves, dwarves and humans who live there. Hugh The Hand is a human assassin who has been sent to kill a king's son. Prince Bane, his intended victim, is an amiable chap and, by a series of curious circumstances, Hugh begins to question his orders, until finally he begins to realise that the death of the young man could put



the existence of his world in peril.

Weis and Hickman continue to use the evocative style they developed in their *Dragonlance* and *Darksword* cycles, combining it with a vastly mapped adventure story where the stereotypes of dwarf and elf are rewritten. This pair know how to tell a story and are plainly interested and involved in what they are doing every step of the way.

Bantam Press has obviously put a lot into the packaging and PR of this series. On first impression, I think their money is well placed.

John Gilbert



But the powers that be have other plans for the man. As the thugs close in, he has a confrontation with Archie, a strange, lonely prisoner who mutters 'How much do you hate', to everyone he meets. Eddie hates lots, and Archie's strange power transfers to him. Now Eddie can create strange creatures, carving them out of any material to hand — rubbish, a car engine, even sewage.

Once released from prison, he takes his power on a tour of revenge, seeking out Sheraton's power bases and destroying them, until he meets the evil underworld boss whom he plans to destroy. His friend Rennie, however, is not sure that he has the control he claims over the power, and his views are amply demonstrated when, out of control, Eddie wreaks havoc on Sheraton's home, and the power escapes to kickstart Armageddon.

Though Laws is as careful as ever to

steer away from flagrant abuse of blood and guts, *The Frighteners* is his strongest story to date. Appearing in the wake of gangster films such as *The Krays*, it depicts a new type of crime empire, fostered and governed by big business, which has control over legitimate as well as illegal activities. Laws' vision of apocalypse is limited and simplistic, but it projects the book's major theme — that good and evil are twin spirits within us rather than out there — admirably. Laws' leaping talent demands an even greater audience.

John Gilbert



GOAT DANCE

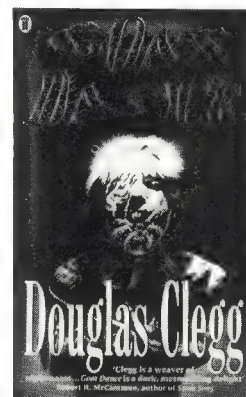
Author Douglas Clegg
Publisher New English Library
Format PB, £3.95



Malcolm Coffey has a fiery, murderous past which calls him as insistently as does the tiny American county of Westbridge. The combination is deadly and, in Douglas Clegg's first horror novel, something terrible gives and the blood begins to fly.

Clegg builds up his print of small town life, and death, through a conglomeration of myriad character points of view, newspaper cuttings, psychological reports and, most importantly, Coffey's *Nightmare Book* which apparently brands him as a psychopath. Slowly, very slowly, the picture is put together, and we learn that there is more than one man's apparent madness involved in this tale of the supernatural.

The townsfolk, however, don't seem to care. He's dangerous as far as they're concerned and, as with the central



character of Peter Straub's *If You Could See Me Now* — of which this book is reminiscent in storyline if not in style — they don't want him in their back yard.

The finale is a supernatural conflagration, forced down upon the town as revenge for deeds done to the real natives a long time ago. Despite Clegg's willingness to go for the gross, however, the book did not add up for me. It contains too many similar characters and the plot is splintered amongst a maddening plethora of short passages.

As a first novel it points to good things for Douglas Clegg who could be a big talent in the horror field. Unfortunately, he still has yet to convince me of his talents.

John Gilbert



IN A DARK DREAM

Author **Charles L. Grant**
Publisher **New English Library/Tor**
Format **PB £3.99/\$4.95**



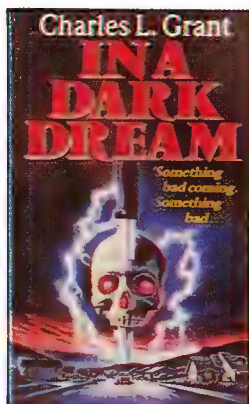
Horror writers generally mellow with age. Their prose begins to pander to the masses, and their lurid blooms of gore, sex and salacious violence are ruthlessly pruned as they settle into middle age.

Not so Charles L. Grant. He's never slashed at an audience with his pen, but prefers to creep up on individual readers and whisper quietly in their ear: 'I've got what it takes to scare you.'

Then he proves it. His latest novel is just such a case in point.

Small town police chief Glenn Erskine begins to worry about the brooding unease exhibited by his daughter Cheryl. She's obviously plagued by nightmares, but when asked about them will only say that 'something bad' is coming. Could it be the young psychopath who recently escaped from his confinement, or the demented stranger who breaks into local houses and daubs warning signs upon the walls?

The answer is, of course, nothing so



simple. Many of the events within this novel are, quite literally, red herrings, tied into the minds of Cheryl and her twin sister — there, I've given too much away already.

Grant's ability to create a threatening, hot-house atmosphere within his novels is again amply demonstrated with *In a Dark Dream*. The odd splashes of blood appear within the pages, but Grant prefers to move his horror in elsewhere, often by daylight, and always when you're not expecting it. Maybe I'm the

one who's mellowing, but I enjoyed every tick and tumble of this artfully written thriller.

John Gilbert



GORGON CHILD

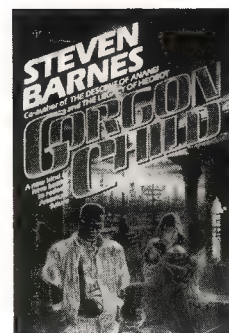
Author **Steven Barnes**
Publisher **Tor**
Format **PB, \$4.95**



After the huge success of his Larry Niven collaboration, *The Barsoom Project*, Steven Barnes returns to solo SF flight with *Gorgon Child*, a novel rooted in consummate contrast to the glorious fantasies of the former book.

We're in a 21st century with devastating problems. The constant milking of the American economy has dried up national resources and turned even the mildest of citizens into animals shattered by poverty, provoked to riot. Guttled by disease, humanity has again become a primitive child.

Aubrey Knight is one of those primitives, anything but valiant, a lethal killer who has been bred for violence. His principles have, however, changed



as he sees his bosses as little better than the rabble they seek to control. He becomes a character similar to Robocop or Stephen King's *Running Man*, physically strong, but with heart enough to care for society. Discovering that a religious zealot is about to make a bid for domination using an army of specially engineered super-soldiers, he goes into action to ensure that the world is not made an even worse place in which to live. But first he must discover and deal with the brutality of his own past, the crimes forced upon him by others.

At first sight, it's difficult to see how a character with Knight's vices, set down in such a grim 21st century scenario, could have any appeal. Barnes, however, makes him genuinely human; if not likeable, then certainly sympathetic.

The toughness of this future is sustained throughout *Gorgon Child*, but what starts out as a book of consequences turns into a novel of deep character. Despite the monstrous landscapes of the near future and the drastically changed living conditions forced upon all but the power elite, Barnes shows that such humanity is still important within science fiction and, for such inspiration, earns my admiration.

John Gilbert



SILENT MOON

Author **William Relling Jr**
Publisher **Tor**
Format **PB, \$4.95**



No, please, not another book set in a thriving American city — this time San Francisco — where a seemingly innocent Bible-thumper is set on returning Ye Olde Gods to Earth. I thought this aspect of the Lovecraft syndrome had been brilliantly and amply worked out in TED Klein's gorgeous novel *The Ceremonies*.

Apparently not, as William Relling Jr, America's answer to Shaun Hutson, retches up *Silent Moon*. The mysterious occult dabbler is Dr Peter Michael, whose angelic ministry is saving people from themselves, while getting the drunks and other bums off the streets and into shelters.

Enter television reporter Gillian Woodbury — acting for all the world like Dee Wallace in *The Howling* — who has a thing about said self-proclaimed minister. Dr Michael is also involved with the presidential aspirations of one Senator Grant who, in turn, is being investigated by ribald news hack Bud Friendly. Both are destined for sacrifice if they don't step off the gas pedal on their investigations — and I'm destined to be a broken man if I read much more of this bromide banality.

Give me Shaun Hutson any day. At least you're never sure whether or not he's taking himself seriously as a writer.

John Gilbert



GLOBAL CATASTROPHE

NIGHTFALL

Authors **Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg**
Publisher **Gollancz**
Format **HB, £13.95 approx**



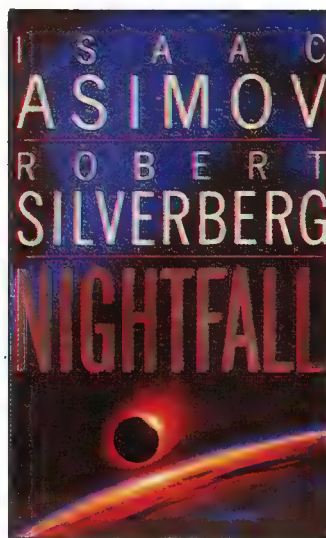
The first in a collaborative series of books which takes several of Isaac Asimov's most famous short stories and turns them into novels which, hopefully, will have a similar appeal to readers as the original works.

Nightfall is a mystery with several challenging strands, set on the four-mooned planet of Kalgash. This strange and apparently quite beautiful world bathes in almost ever-present light, amplified by the moons which, on occasion are all in the sky at the same time. It seems strange, therefore, that at the beginning of the novel one of the central characters, a psychiatrist called Sheerin, should be investigating the sudden mental collapse of customers on a newly opened funfair ride.

At first, the riders' psychoses seem tame enough. They all exit the Tunnel of Mystery gibbering about 'The Darkness', refusing to go into buildings and then, later on when they've been hospitalised, refusing to go outside. Events take a sinister turn when Sheerin rides through the tunnel and experiences the same dread of 'the abyss'. Then we learn that people have committed suicide shortly after exiting this deadly ride.

Miles away, a team of scientists is exposing an archeological site when a strange sand storm hits. They fear that they'll be buried, but the storm passes, ripping open a nearby hillock. Here they find traces of several civilisations banded into the earth and marked by strange scorchers.

Cut to Saro University Observatory where Bennay 25, an assistant professor, asks two of his colleagues to verify some important data he's collated. If correct, he has disproved the Universal



Theory of Gravity because one of the moons is 'a few decimal places' out of orbit.

Quite what all this means, whether as an indicator of global catastrophe or scientific paranoia, is brilliantly summed up in series of illuminating leaps and a fiesty finale. On a final note of slight criticism, it is a pity that the packagers of this deal did not decide to include the original short stories within the book, though in *Nightfall*, for reasons of suspense and surprise, perhaps this exclusion is beneficial. Asimov and Silverberg are quite simply two giants of the SF scene, and they also make an ideal dream team. Their styles are so similar, and yet their ideas are often worlds apart.

John Gilbert



TWO FABULOUS COMPETITIONS



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We've booked the table for a lunch with Brian Lumley in London on July 7, where he will present our competition winner with a signed copy of the **DEADSPEAK** hardback.

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Give the black-winged surname of Brian Lumley's famous psychic detective.

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All entries must reach us by July 2, 1990. As we only have a brief period of time in which to deal with this competition, please enclose your daytime telephone number. Any persons associated with Newsfield, **FEAR** or Kinnell are ineligible for entry.

FIVE SETS OF

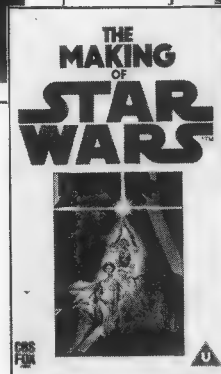
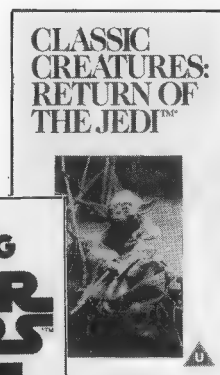
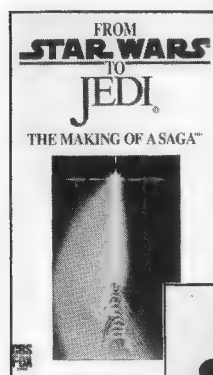
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FEAR FORUM

They believed they could escape, those employees at FEAR... By changing the name of the letters' page each month, they thought they would be safe... but it was not to be. Still the readers sniffed them out... And still they came... If you're one of those unquiet undead types who can't live without a good scrap, then send your argumentative ammo to: FEAR FORUM, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW.

ROMAN HISTORY

Dear FEAR

In suggesting that Roman Polanski has steered clear of the horror genre due to the manner of Sharon Tate's death (FEAR 16), Roger Kean is ignoring a number of things.

Firstly, far from avoiding the tragedy, Polanski's first film after the murders was a version of *Macbeth* containing more violence, murder, bloodshed and death than all his other films combined. In fact, the violence in *Macbeth* is so explicit and sustained that many people have mistakenly viewed the film as an allegorical exorcism of the events which took place at 10050 Cielo Drive on August 9, 1969.

Secondly, Polanski has made a horror film since Sharon's death — *The Tenant* in 1976. Although flawed, *The Tenant* explores 'the inherent fear man has of his environment' more fully, and more disturbingly, than any of his other works.

Thirdly, even *The Fearless Vampire Killers* and *Rosemary's Baby* cannot comfortably be classed as 'genre' movies and it is entirely inappropriate to label them alongside the output of Terence Fisher and Roger Corman. Polanski's films operate



Roman Polanski

on a different level altogether, and whatever the merits of Fisher or Corman as filmmakers, they could not conceivably be expected to equal the achievement of a film such as *Repulsion*.

Finally, the man himself never set out to be, nor ever considered himself, a 'horror' director so it is not surprising that he has steadfastly refused to be pigeon-holed as such. Roman Polanski is also renowned for his perverse sense of humour and it is not hard to imagine him taking great pleasure in gleefully refusing to make horror films precisely because he knows these are the very films so many people want him to make!

Mark Stenton, Sheffield

Pedantic PS: It wasn't Sharon Tate attempting to ward off Alfie Bass's Jewish vampire with a crucifix in *The Fearless Vampire Killers* — the chambermaid was responsible for that unfortunate error of judgement!

Roger Kean replies:

It's true that several commentators have pointed to an exorcism in Macbeth, but that still reinforces my argument that Polanski steered clear of the kind of horror film so openly represented by Rosemary's Baby thereafter — and indeed has not been a serious contender since in any field, excepting the worthy Tess. It may be a matter of individual perception, but I never rated The Tenant very highly, nor did many others, and I don't consider it fits comfortably

with the horror category, whereas I do think the others mentioned do. Quite clearly, these films operate on a different level from those of Fisher, Corman et al, but they are still obviously intended to be horror films — don't make the genre too narrow! And the point I tried to make is that after Polanski, it became harder to accept making films of the kind that the early Hammer fare represented. (Perhaps more important, however, was the release of It's Alive!, which coshed Gothic Horror on the head for many years to come.) You are, of course, quite correct in spotting my error about Sharon Tate and the chambermaid — sometimes a neat story link trips up over reality.

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

Dear FEAR

Further to Vanessa Coutts' letter in FEAR 18, I hope that the following points answer some of the questions raised, and I would encourage other readers to contribute to the 'censorship' debate in as constructive a manner.

1. In reply to your question 'Why were the charges against *The Evil Dead* ridiculous', I suggest you look no further than the quagmire of contradictory verdicts which courts returned during the early Eighties. Throughout the 'video nasties' scare, a large number of dealers were prosecuted under the 1959

Obscene Publications Act for stocking the video of *The Evil Dead*: many of these prosecutions were uncontested and thus successful (a good number of dealers pleaded guilty simply for a quiet life); significantly, however, a large number of courts overturned the obscenity charge, most importantly the much publicised 1984 test trial of Barkers Video Tape Centre, where the jury reached a unanimous verdict of 'not guilty'. Yet due to the peculiar nature of British Obscenity Law, and its relation to the even more peculiar Video Recordings Act, verdicts of 'not guilty' have no status whatsoever in a film's defence. Under the terms of the VRA the BBFC is instructed by the government to 'avoid classifying works which are obscene within the meaning of the OPA'. What this means in practice is that any movie which has been found guilty under the OPA at any time, regardless of any number of cases in which it has been found 'not guilty', cannot be certificated. This seems to me to be an irrefutable case of the law erring on the side of censorship, and ignoring the rights of filmmakers even when a legally appointed jury has deemed their work acceptable.

2. '[Mr Raimi] goes on to say that members of the censorship boards 'can take' unprecedented horror without being 'affected' by it.'

This is a baffling and inexcusably sloppy misquotation, which seems to suggest a less than meticulous reading of the article. For the record, what Raimi actually said (and I accurately reported) was: 'What I don't like is the superiority and the smug attitude that they can take these things and they won't be affected by them.' Raimi is actually saying completely the opposite of what you have credited him with saying.

3. Regarding your comments on the necessity of small groups of individuals to censor material for wider consumption by the general public. In 1973, John Trevelyan, who was for 13 years Britain's Chief Film Censor, concluded his book 'What The Censor Saw' with the following words: 'The British Board of Film Classification should in future... classify any film not suitable for [U, A, AA] categories as an X film, ie: a film to be viewed only by persons of not less than 18 years of age, not cutting or rejecting any such film.' Trevelyan continues to say that, in tandem with such a change, legal constrictions should be enforced making it 'punishable by heavy fines or even imprisonment' for a film company or cinema to allow a minor access to such material. I find Mr Trevelyan's analysis eminently sensible, and I consider it incomprehensible that even with an 18 age restriction, *The Evil Dead* was cut by 40 seconds for cinema

release — before the 65 seconds now missing from the video.

4. 'If Mr Raimi claims the right to be exposed to such material... I claim the right *not* to be exposed to such films.'

Absolutely. Hence your video machine is now presumably fitted with a 'Stop' button. You will find that this enables you swiftly to dispense with any images which you find distasteful. For further protection, avoid films with titles such as *Evil Dead* or *Chainsaw Massacre* — always a giveaway.

5. 'Mr Raimi's absolutist standpoint is in danger of charges of extremity. Does his 'absolute freedom' entail hard-core pornography and 'snuff' movies?'
When I interviewed Sam Raimi, I asked him whether he had ever seen a movie which he felt people shouldn't be allowed to see, to which his reply was: 'I'm sure there are terrible pictures out there, like those snuff movies you hear about'. Pressed as to whether such movies actually exist, he continued: 'I don't know. I personally have never seen anything that I felt I had the right to tell people they couldn't see. Certainly I've seen things I didn't like, and that I wouldn't recommend for others, but I would fight for their right to exist.' Personally, whilst I am very sceptical about the existence of snuff movies (Alan Shackleton's notorious *Snuff* hoax demonstrating the unreliability of hysterical press reporting and public opinion), I find their presence in the censorship debate unfathomable. If a criminal act (ie: murder) is committed, any film of said act automatically falls under the provision of criminal law, and any person knowingly funding or aiding such an act becomes an accessory; this has nothing to do with film classification. In terms of hard-core pornography, may I suggest Linda Williams' excellent book 'Hard Core' as an invaluable source of information.

Readers may also wish to know that the BBFC publishes excellent yearly reports on its activities which are both candid and informative, and provide essential information for anyone concerned about censorship in Britain. These are available from the BBFC, 3 Soho Square, London

W1V 5DE. Also of interest is a document entitled 'Video Recordings Act 1984, A Guide To Its Implementation And Practical Consequences', which is available from the same address.

Mark Kermode, London

PEOPLES' CHOICE

Dear FEAR

Vanessa Courtts' claim that she has the right to choose not to view films she finds objectionable seems reasonable enough. What I don't understand is why she should claim the right to have that choice made for her in a way that prevents other people from deciding for themselves. One possibility which I haven't seen considered is that suppressing fiction in its various forms — since fiction, after all, must be an expression of the culture which produces it — may itself be harmful, since what the fiction expresses is then bound to find another outlet.

Ramsey Campbell, Merseyside

INN JOKE

Dear FEAR

Refer, if you please, to the April issue of FEAR, specifically under the heading 'Inn Set For Super-Signing' on page 30.

H P Lovecraft? All set to pop up at The Fantasy Inn to sign copies of his latest book? Supposedly the fact that he died in 1937 plays no part in this? Could this be the famous FEAR humour we've all heard about?

Actually, you had me fooled too (shameful, I know) until I bought a collection of his. Sneaky. Very sneaky.

Minesh Makwana, Sutton, Surrey

MODEST REQUEST?

Dear FEAR

1. Could you print a checklist of all the film and book reviews you have published since Issue 1, starting at Issue 20 and then every ten issues after that?

2. Is there a possibility of you printing some reviews of films and books that were out before

your beloved mag, such as *The Thing*, *Day Of The Dead*, *Trick Or Treat*, *Interview With The Vampire*, *Relics*, *The Magic Cottage* etc...

Keep up the good work for a long time to come.

John Charles, Lower Willingdon, East Sussex

Frankly, John, the answer to question one is a resounding NO. Can we print a complete list... Good God, it takes us all our time to get the magazine out each month, hur, hur. However, if you're thinking of embarking on this project, for free, we could be interested... As for question two, it just so happens that we're running a review of *Day Of The Dead* this very month. Keep your eyes peeled for others of this ilk as these films become available on video, and look out for our occasional retrospective features, which may cover some of the areas you're interested in.

FEISTY DETAILS

Dear FEAR

Perhaps you can help. I was told recently of a new Raymond E Feist book, set some years after *A Darkness At Sethanon*. Is this information correct, and if so could you pass on the basic details?

Also, has he written anything other than *The Magician* trilogy, *Faerie Tale* and *Daughter Of The Empire* (with Janny Wurts)?

Sarah Smalley, Manchester

PS: Keep up the good work. I especially liked the cannibal feature (Issue 15).

The Raymond E Feist book you refer to is entitled Prince Of The Blood and is set twenty years after the events in the last Riftwar novel, A Darkness At Sethanon. It is published by Grafton Books, £12.95 hardback, £7.95 trade paperback. As far as we know, he has not published any other titles apart from the ones you mention. And, if you liked the cannibals article in Issue 15, perhaps you should try and grab a copy of FEAR 14, which contains the first instalment of this feature. Hurry now, while stocks last...

FEAR

● **FOLLOWS THE HAMMER REVIVAL AS ROCK GROUP WARFARE** plan a concept album supported by Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing, Francis Matthews talks exclusively to Stephen Laws about the past success of Hammer Films, and boss man Roy Skeggs divulges some future secrets.

● **JAMES HERBERT** gives John Gilbert the exclusive on his new book, *Creed*, talks candidly for the first time about his fascinating past, and offers a prize that all fans will want to possess.

PLUS... DAVID MORRELL, author of *Rambo* and the recently televised *Brotherhood Of The Rose*, reveals his penchant for horror. How to make an independent British horror movie, by the producers of *I Bought A Vampire Motorcycle...* Isaac Asimov... Robert Silverberg... and another quiverful of frightfully thrilling fiction. We'll be calling on you!

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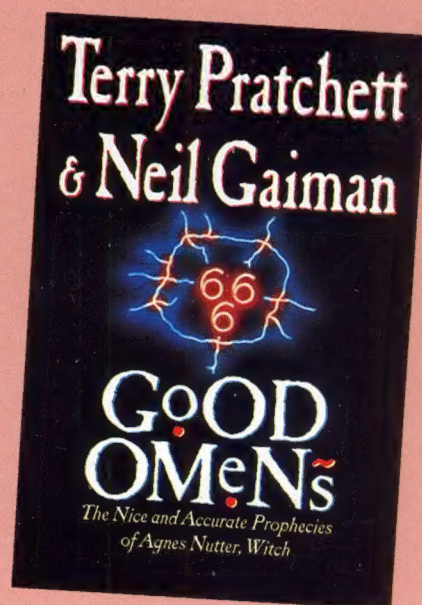
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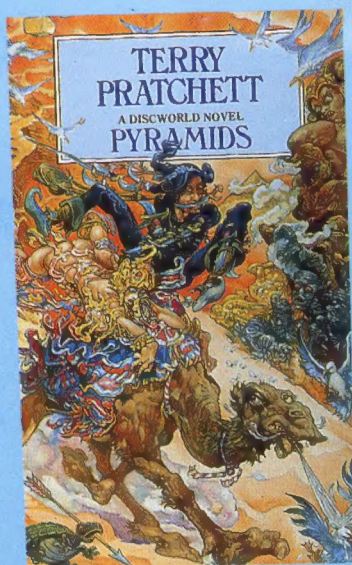
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